

IN DEFENCE OF CORPORATE COMPETENCE:  
THE ROYAL NAVY EXECUTIVE OFFICER CORPS,  
1880-1919

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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ROBERT LYNN DAVISON





IN DEFENCE OF CORPORATE COMPETENCE:  
THE ROYAL NAVY EXECUTIVE OFFICER CORPS, 1880-1919

by

©Robert Lynn Davison

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## **Abstract**

At the end of the nineteenth century the Executive Officer Corps of the Royal Navy faced significant challenges as it dealt with social, economic, political and technological change. Although rising international tension appeared to benefit the service as a whole, changes in force structure and organization presented threats to the professional competence of executive officers. Increased expenditure on defence and increasing public scrutiny was combined with the growth of other developing professions, especially engineering, that challenged older lines of authority. Also, the advance of education and skill of ratings and non-executives weakened the traditional claims by the executive officer corps to leadership over the lower deck and other branches of service. The corps attempted to deal with these issues by asserting its dominance in changing career patterns, finding new intellectual justification for the continued “culture of command” through the advent of modern naval history, and the institution of new, more efficient staff command systems. The corps also attempted to annex engineering functions through the Selborne education scheme of 1902. The outbreak of World War I in 1914, presented the corps with the hazardous task of justifying itself and making good on its claims to dominance within the establishment. Despite the setbacks and disasters of war, the corps largely managed to retain its dominance into the interwar period.

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## Abbreviations

ACNS	Assistant Chief of Naval Staff
ADM	Admiralty Papers
BCF	Battle Cruiser Fleet (or Force)
BL	British Library
<i>BPP</i>	<i>British Parliamentary Papers</i>
BTY	D. Beatty Papers
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CCAC	Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge
CHAR	Chartwell Papers (Winston S. Churchill)
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CINC	Commander in Chief
CNS	Chief of the Naval Staff
COS	Chief of Staff
CW	Commissions and Warrant Branch, Admiralty Secretariat
DCNS	Deputy Chief of Naval Staff
DEW	K.G.B. Dewar Papers
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
DNO	Director of Naval Ordnance
DRAX	R. Drax Papers
DRBK	J. de Robeck Papers
DRYR	F. Dreyer Papers
ED	Papers of the Board of Education
ERA	Engine Room Artificer
GDFY	J.H. Godfrey Papers
HEN	W.H. Henderson Papers
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich
NOE	G. Noel Papers
NRP	Naval Review Papers
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
RIC	H.W. Richmond Papers
RN	Royal Navy
RNM	Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth
RNR	Royal Naval Reserve
RNVR	Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
<i>RUSI</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal United Services Institution</i>
T	Treasury Papers
<i>TIME</i>	<i>Transactions of the Institute of Marine Engineers</i>
WMYS	R. Wemyss Papers

## Glossary

Since the structure of this dissertation is thematic rather than strictly chronological and due to the fact that many policy changes in the Royal Navy had effects on several levels, a glossary has been provided below. Included are the several major education committees as well as policy papers and pertinent orders-in-council. A brief explanation is attached to each entry.

### **1863 – Walpole Committee**

Investigated possible systems for the better regulation of the size and composition of the executive officer corps.

### **1866 – Elliot Committee**

Convened by the Admiralty to investigate the possible elimination of the master branch of executive officers. The master branch was subsequently merged into the duties of regular line officers.

### **1870 – Order-in-Council on Retirement**

Established the system of promotion and retirement with which the Admiralty managed the officer lists for the following half century. It laid down the mechanisms of compulsory retirement and promotion systems and divided officers into active and retired lists.

### **1870 – Shadwell Committee**

Investigated the higher education of British officers in comparison to their foreign counterparts. Set the path for the foundation of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich.

### **1875 – Rice Committee**

Investigated conditions at the training ship *Britannia*. Resulting report says a great deal about prevailing conditions and attitudes regarding cadet training.

### **1877 – Cooper-Key Committee**

Convened to find means to improve the training and the quality of engineer officers in the Royal Navy.

### **1877 – Gordon Committee**

Convened to investigate the workings of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich.

### **1885 – Luard Committee**

Examined the education and training of executive officers from the time of entry until the completion of specialist education as lieutenants.



**1893 – Hoskins Committee**

Investigated the impact of fleet expansion on officer requirements. Not only was it found that the flow of promotion was not progressing as smoothly as expected but the number of junior officers was not keeping pace with fresh intakes into the corps.

**1895 – Order-in-Council on Induction of RNR Officers**

Inducted reserve officers into the regular Navy in order to compensate for shortfalls in officer numbers as a result of the Naval Defence Act and the introduction of destroyers into the fleet.

**1900 – Foundation of the Royal Naval War College, Portsmouth**

Established a permanent training centre to instruct senior officers in the “art of war.” However, it tended to become a dumping ground for officers approaching retirement.

**1901 – Tracey Committee**

Convened to investigate the training of junior executive officers and overhauling the system of training.

**1901 – Order-in-Council on Misconduct**

This regulation gave the Admiralty the power to summarily force an officer to retire with or without a conviction by court-martial.

**1902 – Goschen Committee**

Investigated the state of flow of promotion in the executive ranks. Recommended against promoting officers to flag rank by selection.

**1902 – Selborne Memorandum**

Completely altered the system of officer procurement and training. Cadets in the executive, engineering and marine branches were all to have common entry. After the 1906 Douglas Committee, it was decided to institute procedures whereby officers could switch branches mid-career.

**1904 – Order-in-Council on Distribution of Business**

Concentrated authority over operational matters in the hands of the First Sea Lord directly. This assisted in the provision of the groundwork for an effective staff system.

**1906 – Douglas Committee**

Committee convened to investigate the workings of the new scheme of training naval officers introduced in 1902. Recommended the merger of all combatant officers into one corps.

**1909 – Beresford Inquiry**

As a consequent of the two-year feud between Fisher and Beresford, the Asquith government decided to convene a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence

to investigate charges that Fisher's handling of Admiralty policy was contrary to the national interest.

**1912 – Order-in-Council on the Naval War Staff**

Established the Naval War Staff at the Admiralty as well as integrated staff training for junior naval officers.

**1913 – Custance Committee**

Education Committee convened to examine the results of the results of the Selborne Scheme of 1902.

**1913 – Duff Committee**

Critically examined the shortage of deck officers in the Navy. Recommended finding alternative sources of entrants than through only Osborne/Dartmouth.

**1913 – Slade Committee**

Investigated the capacity of the Royal Naval War College to prepare younger officers to serve as qualified staff officers. Assessed the capacity of the Navy to produce a sufficiency of capable officers to perform staff duties ashore and afloat.

**1913 – Order-in-Council on Special Entry**

Established the framework to induct public school boys directly into the Navy. Also established an abbreviated training scheme to permit such entrants to be able to serve at sea quickly and yet have the same career prospects as regular entry cadets.

**1913 – Order-in-Council on the Mate Scheme**

Authorized the promotion of lower deck personnel to commissioned rank. Marked the first time in the Royal Navy laid down a policy of regular promotion of qualified men from the lower deck.

**1914 – Order-in-Council on Naval Promotion**

Authorized the Admiralty to retire any captain it wished as he approached seniority where the officer concerned would normally expect promotion to flag rank. In effect, introduced promotion by selection while still retaining the trappings of promotion by seniority.

**1915 – Order-in-Council on Engineer Officers**

At the urging of Admiral Fisher in January 1915, all old scheme engineer officers were made "executive."

**1917 – Dardanelles Report**

Parliamentary inquiry of the decisions leading up to the ill-fated assault on the Dardanelles. The investigations of the commission found serious drawbacks in the command machinery of the War Cabinet, War Office and Admiralty.

## Chapter I – Introduction

It is on our Officers as much as on our men that the strength of the Navy depends; and their increased efficiency is of at least as much national importance as an extra inch or two of iron on the sides of our ships, or a few additional foot-tons to the striking energy of our shot.<sup>1</sup>

When approaching the pre-1914 Royal Navy executive officer corps,<sup>2</sup> the historian must empathize with the sentiment expressed in 1903 by Thomas Gibson Bowles, M.P.:

To many members of this House the sea is a horror, the Navy a mystery, and the naval officer an enigma to explain the functions of the naval officer how he is produced, and how dangerous it is to tamper with the provisions whereby he is brought to a perfect state, is a task which might appall even a seaman, and which is doubly difficult to me, who am, after all, but a landsman.<sup>3</sup>

Although Bowles was daunted by even the contemplation of personnel policy, it did not prevent him making a nuisance of himself to several administrations. It is equally daunting for an historian to pick through the remains of Admiralty business conducted a century ago.

The experience of the Royal Navy executive officer corps in the era of the Great War appears on the surface to be a collection of unconnected conflicts. The Fisher

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<sup>1</sup> J.K. Laughton, "Naval Promotion Arithmetically and Historically Considered," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XXIV, No. 106 (1881), 535.

<sup>2</sup> The term "executive officer corps" denotes only those commissioned officers of the seaman branch that were entitled to exercise command over warships. These officers bore the titles of admiral, captain, commander, lieutenant and sub-lieutenant. It does not include other specialist commissioned officers such as Royal Marines, Engineers, Medical or Paymaster officers. The situation became somewhat muddled, however, after the introduction of the Selborne reforms of December 1902 where newly recruited officers of the Marines and Engineers were integrated with the seaman branch.

<sup>3</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. CXIX (1903), col. 882. Bowles left the service as a Sub-Lieutenant.

reforms, the dispute over engineering, the feud between Admirals Sir John Fisher and Lord Charles Beresford in 1907-1909, the imposition of a naval war staff in 1912 and the stresses of World War I all seem disjointed episodes. What connected them, however, was a series of adjustments that officers were forced to make in view of changes in politics, industry, economics, finance and British society. On almost every level, the traditional leadership of the executive officer corps was challenged.

Executive officers were indeed presented with what in effect amounted to a revolution in naval affairs.<sup>4</sup> As the Navy was transformed into an industrialized workplace, officers were challenged by an alteration in the “culture of command.” Command arrangements centred on the sailing ship were still being imposed on the steam and steel fleet at the turn of the century. Indeed, regardless of scientific or specialist knowledge, seamanship remained the ultimate mark of competence. Commissioned sea time “in a ship of war at sea” was the prerequisite for promotion. Even shore establishments were designated as warships and replicated as far as possible the routine of a sailing vessel.<sup>5</sup> The response to this revolution in naval affairs was two-fold and is best represented by the so-called materialist and historical-intellectual schools. The materialists argued that the practical requirements of a modern navy meant that officers

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<sup>4</sup> The expression “revolution in naval affairs” is used in a broader sense than literature surrounding *Revolutions in Military Affairs* (RMA) that came to the fore in the 1990s. The revolution in naval matters at the end of the nineteenth century encompassed not merely changes in strategic and tactical posture but also in the social, cultural and intellectual construction of the naval service. Much of the RMA debate focuses on direct employment of force or the threat of force and as Colin Gray warned often provides “a siren call to indulge teleology.” See, Colin Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 15.

<sup>5</sup> For instance the cadet-training establishment was H.M.S. *Britannia*, the gunnery school was *Excellent* and the torpedo school was *Vernon*. Indeed, in present day Commonwealth navies shore establishments are, in effect, ships. For instance the naval reserve establishment in St. John’s, Newfoundland is H.M.C.S. *Cabot*.

must primarily be technicians. While the intellectuals recognized the importance of technological change, nonetheless they were adamant that technical matters were subject to the dictates of national policy, strategy and tactics. The staff command system, advocated by officers as varied as Charles Beresford, Cyprian Bridge and Herbert Richmond, was designed to co-ordinate technology, tactics and strategy. Not only would this co-ordinate policy but it would also serve as a way of maximizing operational efficiency and reducing cost.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, even the success that enabled the Navy to extract resources from Parliament was problematic. The increase in the size of the fleet impinged on the resources of those classes that for the previous three-quarters of a century had supplied the service with its officers. Expansion in absolute size was amplified by the growth in the infrastructure required to administer the naval establishment. Moreover, increased public interest in defence matters during this period spurred the widespread questioning of the professional expertise of the officer corps. During the Great War, the dreadnought battleships constructed at great cost did little, in the view of the layman; to prevent Britain's near starvation in 1917 through the agency of German submarines. Naval officers found it increasingly difficult to convince their political and financial masters that they could be trusted to meet the requirements of naval defence.

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<sup>6</sup> For example see, Cyprian Bridge, "Material Versus Knowledge in Naval Warfare," *The Times*, 2 March 1906. "Until we put the treatment of inert material in its proper place, and make study of naval warfare the first demand on a naval officer's attention, our present methods, with all their intolerable costliness, will continue. A knowledge of naval warfare cannot be acquired, like a knowledge of Esperanto, by attendance at occasional lectures. Instead of spending most of his time dabbling with material, the naval officer should devote his attention so thoroughly to considering the problems of war that a knowledge of them will permeate his whole being."

With the work of John Knox Laughton, Alfred Thayer Mahan and others during this era, officers and indeed, the general public, increasingly accepted that naval leadership needed to become “scientific” and “professional.”<sup>7</sup> Growing popular interest in naval affairs also led to increased public scrutiny to ensure that the officer corps met these expectations. The Boer War further reinforced this popular interest, when the Army was forced to commit 500,000 troops to subdue a guerrilla force. As a result, assurances by those in gold braid were increasingly met with scepticism. Coupled with growing tensions in international relations and the increased cost of the British defence establishment, growing criticism was directed not merely at the Admiralty but at the very claims of leadership advanced by the executive officer corps. Indeed, the aftermath of the South African War saw the triumph of the concept of national efficiency that, in the view of Geoffrey Searle, transcended political and class lines.<sup>8</sup> A widespread concern came to the fore that Britain was losing its capacity to compete with rising industrial powers (especially Germany and the United States) and hence national and imperial regeneration was required to ensure the future prosperity and security of the British Empire.

The leadership was not only challenged politically but also was confronted by the growth of other professions around the fringes of the naval establishment and by the engineers, a group that undermined the claims of the executive in a fundamental way.

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<sup>7</sup> On Laughton, see especially Andrew Lambert, *The Foundations of Naval History: John Knox Laughton, the Royal Navy and the Historical Profession* (London: Chatham Books, 1999); and Donald M. Schurman, *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). On Mahan, see Jon Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and James Goldrick and John B. Hattendorf (eds.), *Mahan is not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

Each of these professions sought not only to control their own work but also to gain a more powerful voice in the administration of the Royal Navy and the Board of Admiralty.<sup>9</sup> The latter, aside from its political members, was the preserve of the executive alone. The aspirations of medical doctors, accounting officers, naval instructors and others could be accommodated within the system because Admiralty regulations ensured that they could never be anything more than auxiliaries to the core functions of the establishment. But the situation was much different with engineers. The triumph of steam and rapid technological change from the 1860s onwards destroyed one of the key claims of executive leadership at a time when traditional seamanship skills were effectively demolished. Further, the development of engineering and the self-confident assertions of naval engineers and their allies meant that a significant element of command was removed from the direct supervision of deck officers. Although engineers never aspired to displace the ship's captain, they did attempt to seize control over key areas of the establishment and hence to undermine, if only incidentally, the authority of the executive branch.

The leadership of the officer corps was challenged on yet another level: its social status was questioned. With the increased education available to working-class men and the need for new technical skills among naval ratings, the "traditional" methods of

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<sup>9</sup> The Board of Admiralty was the government department responsible for the naval defence of Great Britain. It was made up of a mixed committee of professional naval executive officers, politicians and bureaucrats. The First Lord of the Admiralty was a politician, sitting in either the Commons or the Lords, and was legally the official immediately responsible to Parliament. Typically there was also a Parliamentary Secretary and a Civil Lord who were also civilians. The Secretary of the Board, though not technically a member, was the head of the Admiralty administration. The professional members included naval officers generally Rear Admiral or above (although there were cases of Captain serving as junior Sea Lords). Throughout this period there were generally four professional naval officers serving on the Board.



command based on class and gold braid were no longer sufficient. Along with the increased educational attainments of ratings came pressure for the establishment of suitable career paths and, eventually, the possibility of this body of men attaining commissioned rank.<sup>10</sup> One of the points of pride of the executive branch, and indeed one of its claims to authority, was the close client-patron connection of the corps to ratings. Officers knew Jack in all his glory as they disciplined and loved him, admiring his positive characteristics while forgiving his drunkenness and indiscretions. In the words of Admiral Sir Algernon de Horsey, “[m]y experience is that our men are like good-humoured children, full of work and zeal, and easily led provided only that they serve under strict, tactful, and thoughtful officers.”<sup>11</sup> Advancement based entirely on merit regardless of social origin struck at the heart of arguments centred upon *noblesse oblige* and the belief that certain classes were society’s “natural leaders.”

With changes in education and technology it became apparent that this paternalistic relationship was increasingly unsustainable. This type of relationship was rejected by men such as Lionel Yexley, a retired petty officer, who campaigned for the improvement of ratings through his magazine, *The Fleet*, which began publishing in 1907

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<sup>10</sup> “Naval Recruiting,” *Naval Warrant Officers’ Journal*, XV (February 1902), 13-14; “The mechanical knowledge requires a higher intelligence, a larger mental grasp and a more scientific training, than that needed in the days of masts and sails, and consequently the men to be trained ... need to be drawn from the best educated among our poorer classes. Mere muscular men, which could be picked up by press-gangs... are no longer the sort of recruits which will win in time of stress and strain.”

<sup>11</sup> “The Naval Barracks Émeute” *The Times*, 24 December 1906, 6. See also John Moresby, *Two Admirals: Admiral of the Fleet Sir Fairfax Moresby and his Son John Moresby: A Record of Life and Service in the British Navy for a Hundred Years* (London: John Murray, 1909), 396; and Charles Dundas, *An Admiral’s Yarns: Stray Memories of 50 Years* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1922), 82.



and launched concentrated attacks on Agnes Weston's sailors' rests.<sup>12</sup> Other outlets, like the *Royal Naval Warrant Officers' Journal* edited by Henry Capper, also tried to improve the position of ratings. Petty officers challenged rules that permitted officers to disrate them summarily without trial by court martial. Moreover, the officer corps seemed ill at ease with those ratings not associated with the traditional duties of seamen. For instance, officers had great difficulty dealing with discipline problems among stokers, as were illustrated by events such as the Portsmouth Barracks riot of November 1906 and the mutiny in H.M.S. *Zealandia* in the spring of 1914.<sup>13</sup> As if this were not bad enough, all these affairs were widely reported in the press and debated in Parliament, thus subjecting the Navy, and especially the executive branch, to intense criticism.

Further, the nature of the tasks that naval officers performed had changed dramatically. The concentration of the fleet in home waters meant less chance for foreign service (where the cost of living was considerably lower than on home stations), an increased tempo of operations, heavier loads in regard to training, less leave, and comparatively little time on half pay. As well, the traditional semi-independence of the corps was under attack as power gradually increased at the Admiralty with the advent of the wireless, the staff system of command and the concentration of authority in the hands

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<sup>12</sup> "Charity and the Navy IV: The Naval Officer," *The Fleet*, VI (April 1910), 80. Yexley wrote upon hearing that Agnes Weston was developing a "sailors' rest" for officers: "I wonder what kind of 'missionary' is going to be brought into existence to cope with these helpless sinners? Think of the large number of young officers who are every day are adopting a naval career; think of the squalid homes they come from, and think of the squalid surroundings and the horrible temptations of Osborne College into which they will be cast!"

<sup>13</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 156/77, Disorder in H.M.S. *Zealandia*, 1914; and ADM 1/7895, Incident at Portsmouth Barracks, 1906.

of the First Sea Lord.<sup>14</sup> In order to “get on” in the service, social and political connections, though still important, were decreasing in value, albeit only slowly, compared with the attainment of professional qualifications, particularly in specializations such as gunnery and torpedo. Officers felt harried and increasingly strained as a result of the rapid growth of the service. This problem was coupled with a wholesale shortage of junior officers for fleet duty that dramatically increased the routine workload of those in the lower ranks. In turn, this trend reinforced the already widening gulf between the naval officer and his civilian contemporaries.<sup>15</sup> Naval officers were virtually compelled to proceed down the well-worn path of concentrating on routine duties with the consequence that there was a widespread failure to think “outside the box.” Frequent changes in billets and rotation in and out of the increasing number of training courses lessened the amount of time officers spent at sea.<sup>16</sup> As the fleet concentrated in home waters in response to growing international insecurity after 1904, command became increasingly centralized and comparatively little scope remained for individual initiative. Less prestigious appointments permitted more flexibility but were generally not sought because they carried with them considerably lower chances for promotion.

Hence, on nearly every front the pretensions of the executive branch were challenged, and the corps was forced to take drastic steps to ensure that it remained at the

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<sup>14</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, “Board of Admiralty – Copy of an Order-in-Council Showing Designation of the Various Members of, and Secretaries to, the Board of Admiralty, vol. XLVIII, Cd. 2416 (1905), 163 ff.

<sup>15</sup> *BPP*, “Statement by the First Lord of the Admiralty Explanatory of the Navy Estimates, 1920-21,” vol. XXVIII, Cmd. 619 (1920), 667.

<sup>16</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8374/96, Memorandum on the Rate of Movement of Officers within the Fleet, 1913.

forefront of the naval establishment. In the first place, the issue of technical competence was met. Measures to deal with this stretched as far back as the 1850s with the advent of the *Britannia* cadet training system and the founding of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. While *Britannia* was to educate cadets just entering the service not only in naval discipline but also in mathematics, an increasingly essential tool given the mechanization of the fleet, Greenwich was to do the same thing for senior officers whose education was deemed to be deficient.<sup>17</sup> Officers were encouraged to take courses in steam technology, modern languages, international law and basic maths.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the new specialist schools, H.M.S. *Excellent* for gunnery and H.M.S. *Vernon* for torpedo and electrical work, trained the best and the brightest to take the most prominent junior positions afloat who would eventually be favoured in the race to secure promotion. Promotion criteria shifted in favour of officers who specialized in fields closely related to applying technology to the use of weapons. Officers like the future Admiral Sir John Fisher quickly realized the growing importance of technical matters and built their careers around this type of duty. Looking through the roster of the senior flag officers during the First World War, it is clear that nearly all who held high command were either torpedo or gunnery specialists, with the notable exception of David Beatty. Even if an officer did not qualify as a specialist, he was still compelled to take examinations in those fields to achieve the rank of lieutenant. And these exams were of more than academic interest

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<sup>17</sup> H.M.S. *Britannia* was a permanently moored training ship that was maintained in Dartmouth harbour from the 1860s onwards. After the turn of the century it was replaced by a stoutly built stone college and renamed the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth.

<sup>18</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Foundation of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich," vol. XXI, C. 1733 (1877), 420-421.

since they established the relative seniority of officers. In essence, by the turn of the century the executive branch had begun increasingly to resemble those of their engineering colleagues.<sup>19</sup>

As sailing ships disappeared from the *Navy List* and steam became the sole motive power of the fleet, the engineer below deck gained increased responsibility. Executive officers, however, were expected to have a basic understanding of steam machinery while engineers were denied not only a status equivalent to other "executive" specializations but also the training provided to watch-keeping officers and the concomitant chance to exercise command. Further, certain social disadvantages were associated with engineering.<sup>20</sup> The most ambitious method of dealing with this problem was the adoption in December 1902 of the Selborne Scheme, which virtually annexed the engineering branch to the executive and destroyed the separate avenues of entry.<sup>21</sup> Henceforth, all combatant officers were to be engineers and have the appropriate training.<sup>22</sup>

Another mechanism that played a role in this redefinition of the officer corps was history itself. The rise of "scientific" history and the development of the staff system of

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<sup>19</sup> BPP, "Memorandum dealing with the Entry, Training and Employment of Officers and Men of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines," vol. LXI, Cd. 1385 (1902), 677.

<sup>20</sup> PRO, ADM 7/931, Engineering Students' Parentage, 1909. This is illustrated by the fact that Engineering Students who entered through the old scheme came from less exalted social backgrounds than their executive contemporaries. Of the more than 300 students who entered, only four were the sons of retired executive officers and only one of those was above the rank of Lieutenant.

<sup>21</sup> BPP, "Memorandum dealing with the Entry, Training and Employment of Officers and Men of the Royal Navy and of the Royal Marines," vol. LXI, Cd. 1385 (1902). The Selborne Scheme, introduced in December 1902, was intended to streamline the education and training of combatant officers of the Executive, Engineering and Marine branches into one system. The safeguards that ensured the status of the executive officer were not merely retained but extended over other branches of service as well.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (3 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1952-1959), I, 269, Fisher to J.R. Thursfield, 22 January 1903.

command placed the legitimacy of the command function of the service on a different footing. History offered the corps a unique tool to reassert their competence. First and foremost, the study of the past provided a way to bridge the gap between science and the imponderables of naval leadership. Hence, the essential characteristics of line officers could effectively be modernized by synthesizing the old and the new. Historically derived principles placed the new executive branch on a “scientific” basis and yet they still provided conceptual space and intellectual, social and political respectability for the traditional concepts of command and leadership. History could then be used to regularize the training of officers and be useful in the production scientific principles to guide command decisions. By fixing the questions to be asked of the available historical evidence, and by making the results of these scientific examinations of the historical record available, the executive officer corps could use history to cement its dominance of the naval establishment.

This neat conception of the potential use of history foundered, however, on the rocks of scholarship. The difficulty was that external experts like Julian Corbett and Spenser Wilkinson, and some officers within the service itself, such as Herbert Richmond and Cyprian Bridge, took these scientific precepts of modern naval history seriously and began to apply them to the formulation of contemporary policy.<sup>23</sup> Hence, for the officer corps history became a double-edged sword. While it made a convenient tool to reassert the dominance of the executive, it became a threat when it began to ask basic “scientific”

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<sup>23</sup> Julian S. Corbett, “War Course: Strategical Terms and Definitions used in Lectures on Naval History,” in J.S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (1911, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 307-325; Spenser Wilkinson, *The Brain of the Navy* (London: Constable, 1895); Herbert W. Richmond, “Introductory,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 9-14; Cyprian Bridge, *The Art of Naval Warfare* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1907); *Sea Power and Other Studies* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1910). Admiral Bridge was the Navy’s second Director of Naval Intelligence (D.N.I.) and was born in St. John’s, Newfoundland.



questions about the education of officers. The problem was that those without extensive command experience and even civilians could discern these “scientifically” derived principles and could offer reasoned critiques of the actions of officers.

This bid to apply historical principles to contemporary problems was reflected by the foundation of the Naval War Staff under Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, in 1912 and the establishment of *The Naval Review* in 1913 as a vehicle of discussion and reform within the service. By systematically attempting to apply historical principles to the exercise of command and the culture of the officer corps, these writers were trying to ensure that executive officers would be competent to carry out their core responsibility: the exercise of military command at sea. The First World War exposed key weaknesses in the professional training of naval officers. As in other armed services, total war created a crisis of confidence in the professional competence of the established leadership of the Royal Navy, with a constant flow of misdirected energy and strategic and tactical errors culminating in the dismissal of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe from the Admiralty in December 1917.

## **Historiography**

To deal with the issue of the Royal Navy officer corps it is necessary to address two strands of existing literature. The first comprises material relating to British naval policy prior to 1914. The second is a body of literature regarding the issue of military professionalization as it relates directly to the experience of officer corps, naval and military, in the modern period.

One of the chief problems with much of the historical literature has been its tendency to serve, albeit often indirectly and unintentionally, institutional interests. It is not that some naval historians have been intellectually dishonest or have deliberately manipulated evidence but rather that many of them have imposed an important conceptual constraint on their investigations by failing to ask basic questions about the foundations of their sub-discipline. One of the pillars of naval history from the beginning has been the expectation that it would reinforce the traditional authority of deck officers and act as a guide in the formulation of state policy. Indeed, what was perhaps the seminal work of the sub-discipline in its formative stages, Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, was purposely written to further the power of the state.<sup>24</sup> This tradition has imposed a handicap on naval historians and has limited the questions that they have asked of the available record. Fortunately, several attempts have been made in the recent past to reinvent naval history and reconnect it to broader problems in modern scholarship.<sup>25</sup>

These self-imposed limitations have been a marked feature of the historiography concerning the Royal Navy during and prior to World War I. The cornerstone, of course, has been the work of Arthur J. Marder. Marder, an American and a graduate of Harvard, where he studied under William Langer, wrote a five-volume study of the Royal Navy in

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<sup>24</sup> A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1650-1783* (1890, New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 25-89.

<sup>25</sup> For two examples, see John Hattendorf (ed.), *Ubi Sumus? The State of Naval and Maritime History* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1994); and Hattendorf (ed.), *Doing Naval History: Essays toward Improvement* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1995).

the *Dreadnought* era.<sup>26</sup> Based on exhaustive research in the materials that were then available, Marder's study wove together diplomacy, domestic politics, naval policy and the experience of global war. As impressive as his scholarship was, however, there was a problem with the way he conceptualized his study. For example, as Jon Sumida and David Rosenberg have argued, his discussion of naval policy was confined to conceptual "black boxes" with no attempt to probe related issues such as personnel policy or technology.<sup>27</sup> An even graver problem was that Marder was in many ways a "true believer" in that he admired the Royal Navy as an institution and, in fact, during the Second World War he attempted to join it after being rejected as medically unfit by the U.S. Navy.<sup>28</sup>

Although he loved the institution, Marder's liberal views also led him to identify with officers who wanted to reform the system.<sup>29</sup> In particular, Marder was a profound admirer of both Admirals Sir Herbert Richmond and Sir John Fisher and published collections of their papers in the 1950s.<sup>30</sup> Marder's handling of the latter was problematic because he largely accepted without deeper examination the image that Fisher fashioned for himself as a reformer facing off against reactionaries. His concentration on Fisher

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<sup>26</sup> Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Age of Fisher, 1904-1919* (5 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1961-1974).

<sup>27</sup> Jon Sumida and David Rosenberg, "Machines, Men, Manufacturing, Management and Money: The Study of Navies as Complex Organizations and the Transformation of Twentieth Century Naval History," in Hattendorf (ed.), *Doing Naval History*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> PRO, ADM 178/317, "Application of Dr. A. Marder, U.S. citizen, to join the Royal Navy, 1943-44."

<sup>29</sup> Barry Gough, "The Royal Navy and the British Empire," in Robin Winks (ed.), *Oxford University of the British Empire: Volume V—Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 330-331.

<sup>30</sup> Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*; and Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral: Life and Letters of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952).



tended to overshadow much else of importance in the naval service; consequently, his work provided only a surface explanation of the evolution of the officer corps.

Nor was Marder alone in this, for others have been enthralled by Fisher's personality and energy. One of these writers was Jan Morris, who in *Fisher's Face* claimed to have fallen in love with the Admiral in childhood. The characterization of Fisher as a broad-minded, liberal reformer and his opponents as irretrievable reactionaries has attracted a number of adherents, such as Geoffrey Penn and Robert K. Massie.<sup>31</sup> The fixation on Fisher's dispute with Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, his magnetic personality and the extensive reforms he initiated have served to mask a large number of continuities in the Royal Navy in the period. It is commonplace to ignore the problematic nature of some of the Fisherite reforms and very simple to ascribe opposition solely to reactionary conservatism. In fact, it could be argued that Fisher's career was made by political connections and hence that his experience as a sea-going officer and his fitness for command might be regarded as suspect.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in order to magnify his own accomplishments, he and his supporters denigrated the reforms of the pre-1900 era.

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<sup>31</sup> Jan Morris, *Fisher's Face* (London: Viking, 1995), 12. Geoffrey Penn, *Infighting Admirals: Fisher's Feud with Beresford and the Reactionaries* (London: Leo Cooper, 2000); and Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Fisher had only about six or seven years of sea service in the thirty years prior to taking up his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. This lack of sea service was at one point raised in Parliament by Sir John Colomb. See Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. LXXXVI (1900), col. 339. See also National Maritime Museum (NMM), W. Cowan Papers (COW) 13/2, A.H. Pollen to Walter Cowan, 4 March 1932: "I have sometimes thought that one of the fundamental troubles with Fisher was that between his promotion to Lieutenant and retirement as Admiral of the Fleet, he spent too much of his time in shore billets—Half of his time as a Lieutenant; four sevenths as a Commander; and four sevenths as a Captain more than half as a flag captain, and hardly 2 ½ years in command of a private ship, so that before hoisting his flag on the *Renown* in August '97 he had been fifteen years ashore as Captain of the *Excellent*, Director of Naval Ordnance, Director of Dockyards, and Controller. What of course used to infuriate the fighting men first when he was in the Mediterranean and

It is important to understand that Fisher portrayed himself as an ardent reformer because it suited his purposes. By attempting to ally himself with the leading edge of the Liberal party after 1905, Fisher hoped to secure lasting power over the development of the Royal Navy. There was no attempt to introduce a naval staff system until it became clear that his days as First Sea Lord were numbered. Fisher advanced members of the “Fishpond”<sup>33</sup> by methods not unlike those pursued in the nineteenth century, the only difference being that those promoted were personally useful to Fisher rather than men who possessed extensive social and family connections. This principle also extended to many of Fisher’s reforms. The Selborne Scheme, which was often viewed as a democratic measure, was rather an attempt to annex the Engineering Branch to the executive and to centralize power in the Admiralty. As Fisher wrote to Lionel Yexley in 1909, “[t]he true secret of successful administration is the intelligent anticipation of agitation!”<sup>34</sup>

Some historical studies, however, have proved helpful in exploring the development of the officer corps. In particular, the work of Donald M. Schurman has been crucial. Schurman’s study, *The Education of a Navy*, was the parallel study to Jay Luuvas’s *The Education of an Army*.<sup>35</sup> Both volumes explored attempts by several writers to redefine the intellectual basis of the professional officer corps in Britain in the half

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afterwards when he became First Sea Lord, was his constant howling about readiness for war, when all his sea time as Admiral in command was spent in an armed yacht of his own design.”

<sup>33</sup> The “Fishpond” derisively denoted officers who were known to be strong supporters of Fisher, particularly in the junior ranks. Prominent members of this group included Reginald Bacon, John Jellicoe and Herbert Richmond.

<sup>34</sup> Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 258, Fisher to Yexley, 1 August 1909.

<sup>35</sup> Schurman, *The Education of Navy*; and Jay Luuvas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

century before 1914. Schurman systematically evaluated the impact of several historians on the development of the intellectual equipment of the officer corps. But he did not explore what social and intellectual role these authors played in the renaissance that followed. While there were basic changes in Britain's status in relation to the rest of the world, when navies became increasingly technologically oriented and organizationally complex, a firm intellectual basis was required to place officers and policy on solid ground. But history served a social and intellectual role beyond improving professional performance by becoming a way to reassert the culture of command and the imponderables of leadership and "practical" skill.

There are other important studies that bear on the development of the officer corps in this period. Central are Barry Hunt's biography of Herbert Richmond and Andrew Lambert's work on John Knox Laughton.<sup>36</sup> Both authors agree that naval history provided a basis for the training of officers and that its scientific grounding was crucial to the formulation of doctrine. Also of importance is Jon Sumida's seminal reinterpretation of the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan, in which he discusses Mahan's efforts to blend the scientific and the spiritual to create a new brand of professional officer. Unfortunately, he did not extend his study to explore the impact of this conception on either naval officers or policy. Finally, in his study of the R.N. in this period, Andrew Gordon discusses the culture of command of the executive branch. He argues that there was a division of the corps between those officers who favoured centralized or looser tactical control over fleets. Gordon also makes a contribution by identifying some key problems of

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<sup>36</sup> Barry Hunt, *Sailor Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982); and Lambert, *Foundations of Naval History*.

organization and command, but he is not concerned with examining a profession under siege and its attempts to reassert control.<sup>37</sup>

It is thus clear that several historians have had an impact on the way we think about the central topic of this dissertation. None, however, has directly engaged the core problems that faced the leadership of the Royal Navy: the threat to its autonomy and the perception that, as a group, the officers lacked the competence to confront rapid social and organizational change. Drastic measures were taken to secure executive dominance, as we will see later in this study, and there was also recognition of the need to redefine the officer corps that would be credible intellectually, socially and culturally. This ferment lay at the root of nearly all the conflicts of the period, including the Beresford-Fisher dispute and the struggle over the foundation of the naval war staff. Further, it offers insight into the crisis experienced during the Great War.

As Jon Sumida lamented at a 1995 conference, little attention was been directed to the administrative structure of the Royal Navy in the era of the Great War.<sup>38</sup> This is especially surprising since the fleet increased dramatically in size and grew exponentially in complexity. Although much work has been done on the construction of the dreadnought battle fleet and the disputes over annual estimates, what has been less well understood has been the impact on those expected to crew and direct the new fleet. Although British industry still possessed the ability to out-build its foreign rivals, the

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<sup>37</sup> Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy*; and Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> Sumida and Rosenberg, "Machines, Men, Manufacturing and Money," 25-39. See also Jon Sumida, "British Naval Administration in the Age of Fisher," *Journal of Military History*, LIV, No. 1 (January 1990), 1.

country's naval strength was limited by other constraints. Both Sumida and Nicholas Lambert have done superlative work in illustrating the connections between naval policy and financial limitations.<sup>39</sup> But that is only part of the picture. Although physical resources may have existed to construct great ships, these behemoths not only had to be paid for but also supplied with highly trained and specialized officers and ratings. These men had to be paid, provided with equipment, education and, if any recruitment programme were to be sustainable, good career prospects. With the evolving complexity and size of the Navy such costs began to absorb a growing proportion of the government expenditures. As Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote while preparing the last pre-war estimates:

More ships immediately mean more men, and more men immediately mean more pay and more charges for training and victualling the increased numbers. Then there are more Naval stores, more ordnance stores, more establishment charges generally. More ships soon mean more charges for refits and repairs. Finally, more ships ultimately mean more non-effective charges.<sup>40</sup>

Although there was a political will to maintain the pre-eminence of the Royal Navy, there were also substantial limiting factors that worked to restrain the growth in naval expenditure. For one thing there were limitations on the human resources available to the Navy. The complex and inflexible system of training officers made it difficult for

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<sup>39</sup> Jon Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); and Nicholas Lambert, *Admiral Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), Chartwell Papers (CHAR) 13/20, "Sketch Estimates for 1914-15;" emphasis and underlining in the original. Indeed, even a straightforward expansion of the intake of the cadet establishments would have ripple effects down even to the number of servants required; see PRO, ADM 1/7632, Admiralty to Treasury, 23 January 1902.

the Admiralty to respond in a timely fashion to changing demands. Just before the war, for example, the Admiralty was forced to poach officers from the merchant service, to recruit public school boys without prior training (and socialization) and to promote men from the lower deck simply to provide enough officers to perform basic watch-keeping duties. The shortage of specialized executive officers in the Navigation, Gunnery and Torpedo Branches was particularly pressing. The only systematic attempt to come to grips with the training of officers and ratings was the so-called Selborne Scheme of December 1902, conceived by then Second Sea Lord, Fisher. The idea was to co-ordinate the recruitment and training of combatant officers into a single system that would concurrently reduce administrative complexity and cost while increasing flexibility by offering opportunities for engineers and marines (after 1905) to revert to deck duties and be eligible for high command. Unfortunately, the scheme suffered from two key flaws: it never widened the intake of officers and it did little to improve the flexibility of the new “amalgamated” corps. Because of the voracious appetite for officers, the scheme had to be introduced gradually, and nearly a decade passed before entries under the old system ended. Although successive Boards of Admiralty were fully committed to implementing the scheme, they all too often were forced to resort to expedients to find enough officers.<sup>41</sup> Three years after the introduction of the scheme, marines were dropped from

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<sup>41</sup> PRO ADM 116/1213, Special Entry Regulations, 1913; ADM 1/8370/65, Memorandum by C. Walker on Executive Lists, 1913.



the system because they had different training needs and there was a complete lack of marine officers coming out of the Osborne-Dartmouth system.<sup>42</sup>

In short, the training system was simply unable to produce sufficient officers to meet the needs of the fleet. The most noticeable shortage was of lieutenants, the backbone of ship management. For example, the Walpole Committee of 1863 recognized that there was a need to maintain a close and accurate control over the numbers of this group of officers. By the early 1900s the problem became acute as the size of the fleet increased, older officers retired and the greater complexity of shore training temporarily took more officers out of the available supply for sea duty. As a result, half pay for junior officers was in effect abolished because these men were nearly constantly employed.<sup>43</sup>

This officer shortage influenced every sphere of naval policy. Staff training and the sending of officers to the war course were constrained by the fact that these men were required for sea service. Indeed, even selection to the war course did not guarantee that officers would be able to complete it: according to the confidential books of the commandant of the course, the number of officers taken from their studies to be returned to active service was very high.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> On the specific problems with marines, see PRO, ADM 116/1287, Memorandum by Deputy Adjutant-General, Royal Marines to Admiralty, 15 February 1910; and Donald Bittner, "Shattered Images: Officers of the Royal Marines, 1867-1913," *Journal of Military History*, LIX, No. 1 (1995), 34. In regard to the engineers see Geoffrey Penn, *Up Funnel! Down Screw! The Story of the Naval Engineer* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1955); PRO ADM 7/995, Admiral Fisher's Naval Necessities, vol. III (1906), 25-27, Memorandum by Captain Rosslyn Wemyss; CCAC, CHAR 13/2, G.W. Taylor to Fisher, 23 November 1911.

<sup>43</sup> BPP, "Report from the Select Committee on Navy Promotion and Retirement," vol. X, No. 501(1863), 73.

<sup>44</sup> PRO, ADM 203/100, War Course Records, 1902-1911.

The Royal Navy has been heavily criticized for failing to place enough emphasis on staff training. Moreover, it has sometimes been charged that this reflected a lack of intellectual breadth among senior officers or an inability to comprehend the importance of on-going education.<sup>45</sup> Although hostility to staff training can be found in the historical record, there is also evidence that many senior officers strongly advocated a wider training of officers.<sup>46</sup> The shortage of officers and the fact that many spent an increasing amount of time and energy on routine matters meant that there was less time for study; junior officers became so immersed in their day-to-day work that they became less adaptable once they reached higher ranks. With every new dreadnought that slid down the slipways, more crew and officers were required. Nor was it an alternative to draft officers from the decommissioned "bug traps" on colonial service that were being scrapped by Fisher, since many were unqualified to serve in the main fleet.<sup>47</sup>

Conflicting ideas about education, professionalism and officer development buzzed throughout the more literate sectors of British society in the age of the great naval reforms. Still, it would be a great mistake to think that concerns over educational and professional development suddenly appeared when Fisher became Second Sea Lord in 1901 or when he returned to the Admiralty as First Sea Lord in October 1904. Fisher liked to promote himself as an ardent reformer by contrasting his views with the days

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<sup>45</sup> See for example, Arthur Marder, *From the Dardanelles to Oran: Studies of the Royal Navy in War and Peace, 1915-1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 58-59.

<sup>46</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7712, Minute by Prince Louis of Battenberg, 7 July 1903. Then a Captain, Battenberg eventually became First Sea Lord after Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman in 1913.

<sup>47</sup> This became increasingly obvious with the revolutionary changes in the decade prior to the Great War when officers were dealing with revolutionary changes in their work environment.



when “reactionaries” ran the Navy.<sup>48</sup> Despite such posturing, however, we know that as far back as the 1830s elements in the Navy had been profoundly concerned about the education and professional development of its officers.

Nonetheless, even a cursory examination of the available sources demonstrates the attention paid to officer development, promotion and training in the early twentieth century. One sign of this concern is that officers of stature were placed in charge of the training establishments. Commanding officers of *Britannia* Naval College at Dartmouth in the decade before 1914 included Hugh Evan-Thomas, who commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Battle Squadron at Jutland; William Goodenough, who commanded a cruiser squadron during the war; and Christopher Cradock, who was killed at the Battle of Coronel in November 1914. At Osborne, the first captain was Rosslyn Wemyss, who became First Sea Lord in 1917; Horace Hood, besides Beatty one of the youngest flag officers on the list, also headed the College. The various education committees included a high proportion of officers who reached the upper ranks of the service, and those examined, as witnesses were generally the most able men in the executive branch.<sup>49</sup>

Although the Navy was politically and socially conservative, it was not entirely unresponsive to the need for change. The opposition to Fisher was not so much an aversion of reform as it was resistance to some of the First Sea Lord’s ideas and the manner in which he tried to implement them. The dispute with Admiral Beresford of

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<sup>48</sup> Sadly, this image of the nineteenth-century Navy has been further perpetuated in Penn, *Infighting Admirals*.

<sup>49</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1288, Custance Committee on Naval Education, 1912, pt. 1. This education committee was headed by Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, along with Rear Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss and Captain Victor Stanley. Officers examined as witnesses included Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge and Captain Herbert Richmond.

1907-1909 was not based as much on professional differences as on politics. Beresford was an Irish Unionist who believed, rightly or wrongly, that Fisher was sacrificing the effectiveness of the Navy by trimming the cut of his jib to the Liberal policy of retrenchment. Fisher was also in the way of Beresford's elevation to Admiral of the Fleet; Fisher could remain on the active list until 1911 when he reached the age of 70, while Beresford had to retire earlier.

Lest it be thought that the Navy was completely dominated by old gentlemen with powerful social and family connections, some of the "non-elect" also rose to prominent places in the service. The most obvious of the latter was Fisher, who was "penniless, friendless and forlorn" when he joined.<sup>50</sup> Even officers with the reputation of being difficult could find themselves in good positions. Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, for instance, was the only member of his *Britannia* term to reach full Admiral on the active list, and the *enfant terrible* Kenneth Dewar reached Vice-Admiral. Earlier in the nineteenth century Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key had few family connections and, like Fisher, reached the top of the service. Percy Scott, the gunnery enthusiast, also reached flag rank, with his career only getting sidetracked in an unfortunate incident in 1907.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 69-70, Fisher to Arnold White, 5 March 1906. "My family are very much annoyed by the frequent allusions apparently made to my mother being a Cingalese [sic] princess or something of the sort. Kindly see the enclosed [newspaper cutting], and will you, if you are able, dispel the illusion. Personally, I don't care, but as my relatives don't like it, I've promised to see if it can be denied."

<sup>51</sup> P.H. Colomb, *The Memoirs of Sir Astley Cooper Key* (London: Methuen, 1898); Percy Scott, *Fifty Years in the Royal Navy* (London: John Murray, 1919). Scott was involved in a heavily publicized dispute with Lord Charles Beresford when he received a dressing-down on the Commander-in-Chief's quarterdeck over an inappropriately worded signal. See, "Lord C. Beresford and Sir P. Scott Reported at Variance," *The Times*, 11 November 1907.

The Royal Navy was remarkably tolerant of reformers, radicals and assorted cranks, and despite the upper-class pretensions of the quarterdeck, the service was interested in practical solutions to contemporary problems. Even the staunchest conservative recognized that the Navy existed in the final resort to serve the security needs of Britain by violent action. In particular, the division between “interest” and “graft” that Michael Lewis discussed in his study of the nineteenth-century Navy is apt.<sup>52</sup> Although in the modern view both are considered the antithesis of liberal democratic institutions and sensibilities, the difference is crucial in understanding the Navy in the nineteenth century: while graft promotes a person based solely on personal connections, interest selects an individual who first holds the qualifications necessary for the post, even if the personal factor plays an considerable role in the final decision. Like the much-derided “old boys” network, interest reproduces a certain set of ideals while at the same time advances able individuals. Hence, it is entirely possible for an organization to be highly effective while at the same time fostering “old corruption” in its ranks. Admiral Sir William James was speaking only partly in jest when he argued that the way to advance in the Navy was to marry the Admiral’s daughter.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, Fisher was aided in his reforms by those in the derided “Fishpond.” Although Fisher did not promote individuals on the basis of social origin, he selected bright young officers who were personally loyal to him. When Fisher was accused of favouritism, however, he was merely using an existing unwritten system for purposes that

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition, 1814-1864: A Social History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), 27-28.

<sup>53</sup> William James, *The Sky Was Always Blue* (London: Methuen, 1951), 82. James married the daughter of Admiral Sir Alexander Duff.

his opponents did not necessarily approve. As well, after 1890, the officer corps and naval policy in general attracted unprecedented and sustained scrutiny from Parliament that extended even to the details of officer training and professional development.<sup>54</sup> There were two related reasons for this. First, there was the growing uncertainty of the international situation. Second, there were financial and economic reasons: both the Army and the R.N. had reached the limit of what the British state was willing to fund. Defence expenditure in particular was growing much faster than the British economy as a whole.<sup>55</sup>

The implications of growing defence expenditures also threatened the delicate political balance in the nation and fostered a debate between two different visions of how to pay for Britain's continuing position as a world power. One faction argued that government revenues ought to be increased through indirect taxation on the lower orders, while its opponents contended that direct taxation of the upper stratum of British society through death duties and income taxes was preferable.<sup>56</sup> To avoid having to choose between these two alternatives, both Conservative and Liberal governments opted instead to limit expenditure on the armed services. The financial crisis also inspired governments to demand that the armed services deliver value for money, a requirement that gave impetus to unprecedented intervention into the internal arrangements in both fighting departments. All of this occurred in the context of a widened franchise, a trend that

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<sup>54</sup> For an example, see the debates in regard to the Selborne Scheme of December 1902. Great Britain, Parliament, House of Lords, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. CXXII (1903), cols. 155-191.

<sup>55</sup> William Ashworth, "Economic Aspects of Late Victorian Naval Administration," *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., XXII, No. 3 (1969), 491; see also my Appendix II.

<sup>56</sup> Sumida, *Defence of Naval Supremacy*, 6-28; and Volker Berghahn, "Navies and Domestic Politics," in Hattendorf (ed.), *Doing Naval History*, 63.

complicated what had previously been almost predetermined choices. This change in voter eligibility gave rise to parties unwilling to toe the traditional aristocratic line, such as the Irish Nationalists and the Labour Party, both of which attacked the armed services for elitism and demanded democratic reform. In the view of both parties, there seemed no logical reason that the executive officer corps should remain the preserve of the rich and the sons of officers. This concern was reinforced by demands from the rising professional classes, such as engineers.<sup>57</sup>

### **Military Professionalization**

It is impossible to deal with the problems confronting the Navy in this era without considering further the notion of professionalization. The term, as used by contemporaries and historians alike, is often vague and perhaps could be best described, like imperialism, as being “no word for scholars.”<sup>58</sup> Still, since much of the conflict within the Royal Navy in the years preceding the First World War involved debates over the development of what would later be referred to as professionalism, it is necessary to draw some conclusions from the relevant literature in a military context.

Since there is a consensus about certain key characteristics of this concept a short consideration of what it means to be a “professional” is important. First, and most important, an occupational group must be able to demonstrate that it is able to perform

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<sup>57</sup> Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, 26; and Harold Perkin, *The Rise of the Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989, 2002), 359-363.

<sup>58</sup> William K. Hancock, *The Wealth of Colonies* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1950), 1.

certain essential tasks for the benefit of the wider community more effectively and efficiently than any plausible alternative. Once this occurs, members of a group assume the mantle of being “professionals” and are able assert primacy in a particular field of endeavour. Like other forms of service, the benefit of protection offered to society is the essential function that the officer corps provides to the wider community.<sup>59</sup> Like insurance underwriters, officers provide protection, but instead of managing actuarial tables, these professionals organize the use of violence to further the interests of the community (or, at least the interests of dominant social groups within that community). However, most models of military professionalization indicate that this progression is linear and the end result is a fairly stable organizational structure which is able to standardize performance, regulate entrance and offer its members well defined career paths and status.<sup>60</sup>

In the first instance, it is imperative to understand what we mean by the term profession and it is equally important to have a comprehension of professionalization as a *process*, not merely as a static category. Perhaps the best definition of professionalism, as it relates to military organizations, is provided by Jacques van Doorn. Firstly, van Doorn argues that for an occupation to be considered professional the bar of expertise is raised and the increased status of their expert knowledge is widely accepted in the public sphere.

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<sup>59</sup> For an examination of the concept of protection cost, see Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States, 1500-1660* (London: Routledge, 2002), 54-55. Glete discusses in his prologue the concept of centralized military institutions as the cost of doing business.

<sup>60</sup> For examples see, Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: Free Press, 1960); George A. Kourvetaris and Betty A. Dobratz, *Social Origins and Political Orientation of Officer Corps in a World Perspective* (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1973); and Jacques van Doorn, *The Soldier and Social Change* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975).



Secondly, the individual member of the occupational group increasingly identifies him or herself with that group. Van Doorn wrote:

The two most important characteristics of a profession, however, are the following: (1) a special, well-integrated body of knowledge and skill, and a set of standards and norms, handed on by means of socialization of new members; and (2) a pronounced autonomy of the profession, generally with legal support, repelling the interference of others in the recruitment, selection, and training of candidates, as well as in the occupational conduct of the professionals themselves.<sup>61</sup>

Hence, a group aspiring to professional status is confronted with two simultaneous challenges. On one hand, it must convince a working proportion of civil society and the state of the unique nature of the importance of its specialized skill, while on the other it seeks to have considerable control over the parameters of that expertise and to secure effective dominance over the work process itself. An additional point is that in the case of the modern professions, society is the general beneficiary of a professional's loyalty. Institutional loyalty takes a secondary role to the interests of wider society.<sup>62</sup>

Morris Janowitz, for example, identified five main changes that marked the characteristics of professionalization within military establishments. Firstly, the institution begins to change slowly from authoritarian domination to group consensus. Command and organizational lines of authority no longer rest upon the dictates of rigid, centralized authority but shift to a system where consensus and collective lines of conduct are increasingly important. Second, there is a narrowing of skill differential between the civil and military elites. As the organizational and technological changes increase the

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<sup>61</sup> van Doorn, *Soldier and Social Change*, 35.

<sup>62</sup> Kourvetaris and Dobratz, *Social Origins*, 6.

complexity of the tasks to be performed by officers, they are forced to draw on the skills and expertise of other occupational groups. Officers, accustomed to deference in the provision of leadership, find themselves on the defensive in the preservation of the exclusive nature of their calling. For instance, Janowitz points out that in the U.S. Army before the American Civil War, 93.2 per cent of the personnel were assigned to purely "military" occupations, but by the 1950s that proportion had fallen to 28.8 per cent.<sup>63</sup>

Thirdly, the corps begins to recruit from wider social groups than hitherto. As the education and training required broadens, so too does pressure mount to include social groups previously excluded from leadership positions. Traditional leadership based upon social status becomes increasingly untenable. Fourthly, as the corps becomes more specialized there is a growing diversity of career patterns and experiences. This is especially critical in times of rapid change when unique experiences of individuals and different specializations may create a critical mass of officers who might be able to steer the entire establishment in new directions. Lastly, there is an engagement in the debates between politics and the dictates of honour. No longer mere warriors, modern officers begin to take on the role of professional managers and technicians. In the upper echelons, politics becomes increasingly important. Diversion from traditional codes of honour and discipline becomes problematic as it strikes at the heart of the self-image of the officer and also impacts upon the public perception of the exclusive nature of military leadership.

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<sup>63</sup> Janowitz, *Professional Soldier*, 9.



Officers may become enmeshed in "billet punching" and may be tempted to sacrifice "gentlemanly values" for self-aggrandisement.<sup>64</sup>

It would also be instructive to see how far the model proposed by military sociologists George A. Kourvetaris and Betty A. Dobratz in the typology of officer corps and their relationship to civil authority fits this case.<sup>65</sup> Kourvetaris and Dobratz divided up the historical experience of officer corps using several models, which may help provide insight into the case of the British naval officer corps. One of their concepts that is particularly instructive is the feudal/aristocratic model in which officers, although trained to arms, were nonetheless amateurs and selection and promotion were through kinship and other social connections. With the convergence between domestic politics and the officer corps, no serious clash between the interests of the body politic and the officer corps existed. However, as society became more stratified along professional lines and as the old certainties became increasingly problematic, officer corps were forced along those same lines into bureaucratization and specialization to cope not only with the changing social and political framework but also much more complicated technology. Promotion and selection was widened socially, and education and merit became the method of selection rather than social and political ties.

Let us test this model in relation to the British naval officer corps. There is no doubt that the corps, along with their army brethren, encountered a broad divergence in its relationship to the state. The breakdown of aristocratic government in Britain, coinciding

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-16.

<sup>65</sup> Kourvetaris and Dobratz, *Social Origins*, 3.

with the declining economic performance of landed families (particularly those of more modest means) after 1870, brought about a divergence in interest within the more conservative elements of society, which included both officer corps. This divergence came at the same time that there was a perceived crisis in both armed services that required the undivided attention of politicians, since the professional officers seemed unwilling or unable to provide such. In the years following the Boer War, the Army was completely overhauled by the intervention of political ministers. In a similar fashion, Fisher's willingness to sacrifice many of the roles of the Royal Navy triggered a revolt in the Navy's officer corps. A rearguard defence of the privileges and powers of the executive officer corps reflected the revolt in the Navy, most particularly in the senior ranks and among those on the retired list. Symbols and titles therefore became the battleground for prestige and power in some elements in the service. For instance, there were battles over the executive "curl" on the sleeve of officers' monkey jackets and the attempt to preserve the titles "lieutenant," "captain" and "admiral" only for those on the line. Also, the fight over the preservation of symbols provides an important source of the suspicion of the Selborne Scheme, despite its apparent aristocratic origin.<sup>66</sup>

However, the Kouretvaris and Dobratz model, helpful as it is, leaves many questions unanswered. Like all models, this one sometimes attempts to impose relatively simple concepts on complex realities. First, the naval officer corps in Britain had considered itself a professional corps for a very long time. As early as the late seventeenth

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<sup>66</sup> Although the First Lord, the Earl of Selborne, was credited with the development of the New Scheme it was in reality the brainchild of then Second Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Fisher. However, the authorship was not a well-kept secret, as elements within the Service smelt a rat or, more particularly, the efforts of "Radical Jack" Fisher.

century, there were printed Fighting Instructions which officers were expected to follow and which prescribed sanctions for failure to meet standards.<sup>67</sup> There was a court martial procedure that weeded out the inept and the perceived failures. The eighteenth century witnesses the introduction of examinations for the rank of lieutenant, and the system of half-pay was instituted to retain the services of officers in time of peace. During the Napoleonic wars, a naval college was founded at Portsmouth to train new aspirants to the quarterdeck. Further, the officer corps was a more “democratic” institution than it became later in the nineteenth century: it was entirely possible, as the experience of many officers showed, to rise from the lower deck to captain and even admiral, a feat that proved largely impossible again until the mid-twentieth century. As Michael Lewis found in his social study of the Navy in the nineteenth century, as the memories of the Napoleonic wars faded and there was a reduced need for officers, there was a gradual increase in the social stature of the service.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the new stress on greater educational qualifications and age limitations upon entry ensured that new officers came from the “right” sort of background. Policy-makers and officers themselves also realized that officers were the agents of empire who often had to deal with troublesome foreigners, and hence it was important that such men met a certain image of a gentleman.<sup>69</sup>

Hence, the Navy was semi-aristocratic and yet professional. No one, not even royalty, would be permitted to command a ship or a fleet if he was not qualified, but

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<sup>67</sup> See, John Creswell, *British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century: Tactics in Battle* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972).

<sup>68</sup> Lewis, *Navy in Transition*, 22.

<sup>69</sup> William Goodenough, “The Preliminary Education of Naval Officers,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XV, No. 64 (1871), 339-340.

social position could still assure the best chance of rapid promotion and selection for the best billets. With the increased cost of education and the nomination process that prevailed in the nineteenth century, the professional stature of the naval officer ensured its exclusive nature. Indeed, this concern with the image of the naval officer became so prevalent that many were willingly prepared to sacrifice getting the best educated and prepared man in order ensure that they got the right sort, and that as long as there were sufficient candidates of the sons of gentlemen or learned professionals there was no need to widen the intake of officers to include those of more modest social origins.<sup>70</sup> It is interesting to see how debates over professionalization could seek to limit the intake of elements considered less than desirable despite their educational qualifications. Indeed, the immersion in professional seamanship at a young age considered so necessary for the nineteenth century British naval officer became an effective social barrier since only those who had the advantage of family connections and suitable early education could be selected.

As can be seen by the above discussion, the professionalization of the officer corps was not merely a simple progression from one model to another. Over time, conditions shifted depending on changes in British society and politics. However, the concept of officers as gentlemen had not gone away. The officer corps, despite the tribulations of the First World War, still remained a gentleman's profession. Officers

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<sup>70</sup> Hubert H. Grenfell, "The Best Method of Providing an Efficient Force of Officers and Men for the Navy," *RUSI*, XXVI, No. 115 (1882), 301; "On the whole we do not want a high average of intellect in the Navy. The monotonous conditions of a naval life, the long absences from home, the necessary periods during peace-time of comparative idleness, are not in favour of intellectual growth and activity... The average class we get, make no means on the whole the worst officers. They are contented with their lot and possessing the usual qualities of the English gentleman, command the respect and obedience of their men."

continued to marry admirals' daughters and continued to foster social and political ties, but the service did become much more ruthless in weeding out the inefficient.

In addition, other military sociologists have examined the impact of industrialization on military institutions. In particular, this process broke down the old-fashioned model of a military structure representing a relatively simple pyramid in which the higher the rank, the fewer the personnel. The introduction of new technology and with specialized skills outside the traditional executive officer corps muddled the waters of authority and the power of the executive branch.<sup>71</sup> In the same fashion, the increased size and complexity of personnel broke down the traditional role of the executive officer because it placed restrictions on his capacity to supervise officers and men of other branches. In other words, there was a fraying of control over work and skills.

A better hypothesis for understanding the professional changes in the Royal Navy's officer corps is one put forward by Thomas Kuhn.<sup>72</sup> In his study of the scientific community, Kuhn argued that scientific revolutions occur when a particular way of looking at the world – a philosophy of science, or a “paradigm” – is placed under stress when repeated inconsistencies begin to appear and the old paradigm becomes increasingly discredited. Eventually, as these inconsistencies grow in frequency and strength, the conception of science itself must evolve to account for discordant phenomena. So it is with professions. For many years, the officer corps could carry on in much the same way throughout much of the nineteenth century. The professional

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<sup>71</sup> Van Doorn, *Soldier and the State*, 19-21.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

paradigm remained generally accepted. With changes in society and in working conditions, the old profession had to alter its “contract” with society.

Further, professional expertise is only half the picture. Even today, professionals rarely identify themselves exclusively with their field. British officers viewed themselves as more than executive instruments charged with performing tasks in exchange for rewards. Officers regarded themselves as natural leaders and were profoundly affected by social change. Falling returns on agricultural produce put pressure on members of the gentry to search for careers for its sons. As the gentry were squeezed out economically and politically, only one claim was left. The Navy was the logical place because it was cheaper than the Army and, most importantly, provided an option in which social position still counted. In other words, recourse to the profession of arms could be regarded as the last bid of the old gentry to assert moral leadership and the traditional importance of command.<sup>73</sup> Hence, it was not merely a matter of technological change but a way of life that was under attack. The pretensions of the new engineering branch were bitterly resisted not because executive officers hated machinery or were particularly distrustful of engineers in general. Indeed, most of all bitterness was directed against those challenging the traditional command culture through a combination of technological change, the growth of Admiralty control and the narrowing of the field of competence for Britain’s traditional leadership. This argument remains valid even for officers recruited from the “respectable” professions, since the semi-aristocratic pretensions of the officer corps were the social property of all the members of the executive branch.

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<sup>73</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 71-86.



This conception of professional change over time explains a great deal in relation to the Navy's officer corps. As the old paradigm of command based on seamanship, honour and intangible personal qualities came under stress, the corps was forced to redefine itself. This was especially critical in the late 1890s and the early 1900s, as another conception of naval leadership presented itself in the form of technical knowledge. The advent of naval history and the Selborne Scheme that attempted to synthesize the officer corps into one organic whole were essential efforts to ensure the continuation of executive dominance.

Closely connected to issues of professionalization is the debate surrounding innovation in military institutions. This debate is dominated by two American scholars, Stephen P. Rosen and Barry R. Posen. Posen argues that changes in doctrine and organization within military institutions come about primarily through the intervention of civilian authorities in alliance with "maverick" professional officers. Military institutions are bureaucracies intent on producing identical results and hence pre-disposed against innovation. In his three case studies of Britain, France and Germany in the period between the world wars, Posen finds very little internal innovation, since most was forced upon the military by outside political authorities.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Rosen argues that military organizations are remarkably self-adaptive and that civilian oversight is a rather blunt instrument that must make use of a pre-existing, pre-disposed senior leadership to implement desired reforms. Generally, the scope for civilian leadership is often reduced

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<sup>74</sup> Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 224-225.

to the running of political “interference” for the internal innovators.<sup>75</sup> In the case of the Royal Navy in this period, Rosen is quite convincing, although he sometimes understates the importance of civil leadership at critical points in time. In times of crisis and national stress, civilian leadership can be in a much stronger position, particularly when there is a breakdown in the “culture of confidence” and professional mavericks and their allies are in a powerful position to implement necessary reforms. When it is demonstrated that military leadership is flawed, there is an opportunity for civilian leadership to act as a catalyst to initiate or accelerate pre-existing reform impulses. Both Posen and Rosen are in that sense right and wrong. Significant reforms can work both ways, but Rosen is correct that a general continuum of ideas consistent with the reform must be present in order to give it “legitimacy” in the eyes of the service at large.

The difficulty with the whole debate between Rosen and Posen in the case of the Royal Navy is that at the beginning of the period there was a naval officer corps in which there was an indistinct line between the professional and political. Although officers talked a great deal about their distrust of politicians, this did not become an issue until after the turn of the century. To a large degree, the naval elite had close family and social relations with those running Parliament and those who generated the most income to the state. Although the Navy was separate as a profession from the rest of gentlemanly society, it still retained close connections to the landed/commercial establishments. With the growing weakness of the landed establishment and the gentry after the twin Liberal

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<sup>75</sup> Stephen P. Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 8-22.



landslide victories of 1905, the officer corps was for the first time in a long while forced to defend its privileges.

Essentially, the professional/political divide which underpins the assumptions of the Posen and Rosen dispute is of limited utility in analyzing the Royal Navy in this period. In fact, only during the years leading up the Great War and during the war itself did the debate become germane. Naval officers increasingly found the council rooms of state unfriendly places, where gold braid was not automatically deferred to, even on basic professional questions. It was only during the era of the Great War that the divide between the professional and the political became increasingly stark.

The officer corps was forced to redefine themselves because of the shift in British society and politics. The success of the British Navy in securing a significant proportion of the resources of the British state became a source of institutional weakness and instability. With increased demands on the state for non-traditional areas of expenditure, like education and social welfare, the fracturing of the Liberal-Conservative dyarchy and the struggle over state finances generated serious questions about where the money went.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the concept of professional refers to an occupational group that self-consciously attempts to monopolize or otherwise effectively control the work process for which it claims responsibility. This group constantly strives to retain this control over its own area of work (and even over the work of other groups) through various levers of power available to it whether political, cultural, and economic or through superior specialist education. At any rate, the occupational group must construct standards of conduct and complex organizational structures in order to convince

a working proportion of the general population that their claim to authority benefits the entire community and not merely the group's own vested interests.

## **Outline**

The thesis is divided into ten chapters. The first three chapters, establishes the background of the officer corps during this period. Chapter II explores the changing social and political conditions in Britain in the late nineteenth century. Of particular interest are the evolving patterns in British politics and the socio-economic evolution affecting the classes that provided leadership for the state and the Navy. The phenomenon of middle-class professionalism, which was such a factor in European societies, will be explored. All these factors played a role in the changing social relationships in the Navy. Chapter III examines the prevalent culture and development of the executive branch. Methods of selection, promotion and discipline will be critically evaluated in order to give the reader the sense of a nineteenth-century gentlemanly profession.

The second section discusses the factors that impinged on the ability of executive officers to dominate the Navy. Chapter IV develops the argument that the impact of social change in Britain and the evolving working conditions posed a direct threat to officers' conception of a gentlemanly profession. There were various pressures, including the relative deterioration of the socio-political elite that provided the bulk of the officer corps; the narrowing of the definition of professional competence; the increasing lobby for commissions for ratings; and the pressing shortage of officers. Since one of the threats to the line officers was especially serious, Chapter V explores the consequences of the

growth in size and power of the engineers. While the executive branch was not comprised of Luddites, the rise of the engineering profession threatened to shift the balance of naval leadership.

The third section encapsulates the institutional responses to the threats detailed above. Chapter VI examines the attempts of line officers to redefine themselves and their self-conscious attempts at professional reform, which culminated in the Selborne Scheme of 1902. Chapter VII explores the value of the new discipline of naval history in providing an essential synthesis that buttressed the executive's claim to moral, intellectual and social superiority. History bridged the essential gap between empirical science and random imponderables such as leadership, discipline and the power of command.

The fourth and final section deals with the conflicts associated with changes in command arrangements and the results of the First World War. Chapter VIII focuses on the pivotal experience of organizational and institutional change during Winston Churchill's tenure as First Lord of the Admiralty. Self-conscious attempts at redefining the officer corps began to take shape, with the primary reforms being the institution of a naval war staff in 1911 and the foundation of *The Naval Review* in 1913. Both reforms sought to recouple the navy to the experience of the modern professions and represented attempts to bridge the divide between organization and reality. Chapter IX is on the crisis of war, which exposed basic weaknesses in the naval officer corps and led to various attempts to introduce revolutionary changes. These efforts culminated in the dismissal of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe as First Sea Lord in December 1917. The conclusion demonstrates the strong undercurrents of continuity within the British naval establishment despite the plethora of change in naval affairs during this era.

## Chapter II

### Social Change and the Officer Corps

Oh, my boys, how can I speak strongly enough to you on this vital question! I don't think I can speak too strongly. Not only does your own future depend upon it, but the future of Osborne depends upon it, the future of the Navy depends upon it, and England depends upon her Navy. You are the Navy of the future, and if your character gets corrupt and low, decline will slowly set in and be our ruin. In the long run everything depends on CHARACTER. My boys, the Navy looks to you; England looks to you, to make her strong, to keep her honour pure and high.<sup>1</sup>

It is axiomatic that naval establishments in general and officer corps in particular are profoundly affected by social, economic, cultural, technological and political change. As shifts in British society occurred, it became readily apparent that those possessing power and influence would find their positions under scrutiny and that new forms of legitimacy would be essential. Complex, interlocking social and economic forces compelled elites to find new foundations on which to base their claims to authority. In the case of the Royal Naval officer corps, older methods of selection and education had to be modified rapidly to fit the development of modern professionalism. New technology, like cable and wireless, enabled central command to exercise closer control over distant forces. International pressure and the struggle to extract the utmost fighting power from a given financial outlay made co-ordination crucial from a political standpoint. The new "mass electorate" was informed by the rise of a modern mass media. Further, this electorate had to be convinced not merely that a powerful naval establishment was necessary but also

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<sup>1</sup> F.S. Horan, *A Call to Seamen, and Other Sermons Preached to Naval Cadets at the Royal Naval College, Osborne* (London: John Murray, 1907), 21-22.

that the existing executive officer corps was the most appropriate group to direct it. The response to these new mass politics led to a series of crises that afflicted the officer corps.

One of the most obvious changes in this era was political. With the passage of the reform bills of 1867 and 1884, Britain began a process of democratization that gradually relaxed the hold of the old patrician families over the state. Lord Salisbury's "Hotel Cecil" politics were nearing an end as the Boer War accomplished even the Conservative landslide in the so-called "Khaki" election of 1900 only with the mass support of an electorate enflamed.<sup>2</sup> The process accelerated after 1905 with the election of a "radical" Liberal government that faced down the challenge of the Lords over the 1909 "People's budget" and effectively destroyed its capacity to stand in the way of the Commons.<sup>3</sup> This trend had a tremendous impact on the executive officer corps, and not merely on those who were members of the peerage. To be sure, officers such as Lord Charles Beresford, Lord Charles Scott, Rosslyn Wemyss and Hedworth Meux were all closely tied to the power of the old order. But whether naval officers were aristocrats was less important than that their profession in general shared the same values. By virtue of holding the King's commission and wearing the uniform, they were considered gentlemen and had a stake in the *status quo*. Naval officers as well were integrated into the system of honours and rewards that held out the possibilities of knighthoods, peerages, honorary postings

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<sup>2</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 711. In Balfour's government in 1902, fifteen of twenty members were from the landed establishment.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-54; see also George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1910-1914* (1935, New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), 30-68. Prime Minister Herbert Asquith with the co-operation of the King threatened to override the opposition of the Lords to the budget by threatening to create new peers.

and entry into the upper echelons of society.<sup>4</sup> Further, since the services tended to attract either younger sons or relatively impoverished members of the landed establishment, the retention of “gentlemanly” values was especially important in a profession that allowed them to maintain an appropriate lifestyle.

Connected to these political changes was the development for the first time in Britain of a mass media. At the end of the century, Britain was awash in newsprint from such papers as *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, as well as current affairs periodicals such as *Blackwood's*, *The Nineteenth Century and After* and *The Spectator*, which were all keen observers on matters related to the public interest. But the most significant change was the publication of cheap daily newspapers pioneered by the efforts of the Harmsworth brothers, Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere. Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*, sold at ½ d. per copy, catapulted him into immense wealth and influence as its circulation reached over half a million shortly after its founding in 1896.<sup>5</sup> His influence reached the point where it was admitted during the First World War by one cabinet member that Northcliffe was virtually a “ministerial colleague.”<sup>6</sup> With his purchase of the cash-strapped *Times* in 1908, Northcliffe also had direct access to a more respectable audience that further enhanced his power and influence.

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<sup>4</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), W. Wemyss Papers (WYMS) 2/6, Reflections on Trafalgar. “The Services are not like a political career, stepping stones to places of high emolument... and their members have little to look forward to other than the barren satisfaction of having served their country. The pay is small and very inadequate to modern life; the honours, which might be looked to as the crowning of a successful career, are now so lavishly distributed as to rob them of all value.”

<sup>5</sup> R.C.K. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 312.

<sup>6</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 116/1805, F.E. Smith to Eric Geddes, 31 October 1917.



The rise of a mass media had significant consequences during an age in which the general public cared about naval affairs. The popular press could question not only the competence of the Board of Admiralty but also that of the entire officer corps. As naval issues became more pressing and expensive, the entire naval establishment was subject to intense scrutiny, even from the officer corps' supposed allies in the navalist press; and indeed, the Navy League itself became a thorn in its side.<sup>7</sup> During the war years the press served to weaken the authority of the executive officer corps, or at least of its most senior members. Writers like Colonel Charles à Court Repington in *The Times* and Arthur Hungerford Pollen in *Land and Water*, as well as the editorials in the *Daily Mail*, subjected the Admiralty to intense criticism through the crucial year of 1917. This condemnation was often so severe that it induced Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, then First Sea Lord, to seek the advice of the Attorney General, F.E. Smith, about the possibility of a prosecution.<sup>8</sup> This pressure, coupled with efforts of junior officers and the connivance of the Prime Minister, eventually forced Jellicoe's removal from the Board of Admiralty in December 1917.

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<sup>7</sup> "The Navy League and the Navy," *The Times*, 6 February 1907. In a letter to the editor Admiral Sir John Hopkins resigned his membership of the executive committee of the Navy League. "No, Sir, I do not, nor can I uphold the carping criticism that too often distinguishes the utterances of that body...I joined the Navy League because it had done good service in putting before the public the necessity for a strong Navy; I now leave it because I have long been dissatisfied with its general interference in technical details that must and should be left to the Admiralty, and which have nothing whatever to do with the original object of the league the absolute necessity of unquestioned strength in our first line of defence."

<sup>8</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1805, F.E. Smith to Sir Eric Geddes, 31 October 1917.

Another important core change that affected the officer corps was the triumph of science and the advent of the modern professional ideal.<sup>9</sup> Both phenomena became not merely methods of introducing new and more efficient work processes but of establishing the ultimate claim to expertise in a given area. As the empirical sciences became more crucial in the performance of tasks deemed essential by society at large, the new educated elites were tempted (and they perceived it necessary) to extend professional “scientific” control over wider areas. In the case of engineering, specialization divided up the profession into various sub-groups.<sup>10</sup> Further, the authority of science was often used to deal with social problems on the assumption that professional “social engineers” were uniquely well equipped to look after all of society’s ills. The most extreme form of this endeavour in relation to naval officers was the call by Americans Charles Davenport and Mary Scudder to use eugenics to select the best and brightest to command ships and fleets.<sup>11</sup>

The growth of state bureaucratic structures was also important. The absolute growth of the British naval establishment, as well as the proliferation of specialized skills, meant that the Navy was increasingly difficult to manage. This often required an increase in the size and power of the Admiralty that tended to widen the distance between the executive officer corps and the civil administration. Although there was a long tradition of distrust

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<sup>9</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Rise of the Professional Society: England since 1880* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge, 2002), 116-122.

<sup>10</sup> For an extensive exposition of this process see: Robert A. Buchanan, *The Engineers: A History of the Engineering Profession in Britain, 1750-1914* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1989), 88-124.

<sup>11</sup> Charles B. Davenport and Mary T. Scudder, *Naval Officers: Their Heredity and Development* (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1919).



between the Admiralty and the sea-going fleet in the age of sail, the gulf widened significantly during this period. Indeed, one factor that was considered when the Admiralty introduced the staff system of command beginning in 1911 was the possible opposition and obstruction of the civilian secretariat.<sup>12</sup> Vice Admiral Kenneth Dewar complained forcibly in his autobiography about the "civilianism" of the Admiralty and the creation of vested interests in the administrative structure of the Navy.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, changes in the British economy including the loss of the nation's competitive edge, acted as an accelerant that emphasized the growing insecurity that characterized this period. Public discourse was full of references to the increasing difficulty that manufacturers had in selling their goods in markets that hitherto had been British-dominated.<sup>14</sup> Further, Britain was increasingly dependent not merely on imported foodstuffs and raw materials but also on external supplies of manufactured goods, particularly those associated with the second industrial revolution such as electrical equipment and chemicals.<sup>15</sup> The saving grace was Britain's mastery of international financial markets and the provision of vital services such as shipping and insurance.

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<sup>12</sup> PRO, Cabinet Papers (CAB) 1/31, Pt. 3 Memorandum for the Board on Staff Work, 1913.

<sup>13</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, *The Navy from Within* (London: Gollancz, 1939), 299-300.

<sup>14</sup> D.C.M. Platt, "Introduction: Britain's 'Decline,'" in D.C.M. Platt et als. (eds.), *Decline and Recovery in Britain's Overseas Trade, 1873-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 5-7. See also, Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 24-26.

<sup>15</sup> François Crouzet, "Trade and Empire: The British Experience from the Establishment of Free Trade until the First World War," in B.M. Ratcliffe (ed.), *Great Britain and Her World, 1750-1914: Essays in Honour of W.O. Henderson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 212; Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 178-181.

Consistently in the decade before the Great War, this invisible income kept the balance of payments account solidly in the black.<sup>16</sup>

The reliance on food imports combined with the relative decline in the importance of British manufactured exports left the country in a potentially vulnerable position in the event of international conflict. Food supplies could be interrupted which could threaten the capacity of the country to function and indeed, foodstuffs before the war became an emotive political issue.<sup>17</sup> Further, the limitations of the British economy and state finance weakened the capacity to provide naval defence for the empire's lines of communications at the same time as the country was increasingly exposed.<sup>18</sup> Even a major international conflict in which Britain was not directly involved could have extremely serious consequences for the international economy and impair its invisible earnings.

There were also significant problems in the domestic economy that reinforced these trends and impaired the leadership of the classes that managed the British state. The landed aristocracy and the gentry were gradually losing ground not merely in the political realm but also economically. The dramatic fall in the value of domestic agricultural production thirty years after the adoption of free trade severely affected the gentry and to a lesser extent the aristocracy.<sup>19</sup> Although it can be argued that the majority of naval

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<sup>16</sup> Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 14.

<sup>17</sup> BPP, "Report of the Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Raw Materials in Time of War," Vol. XXXIX, Cd. 2643 (1905).

<sup>18</sup> Jon Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 10-28.

<sup>19</sup> E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1995), 11-13.

officers did not belong to either group, the profession of arms was closely tied to the values of aristocratic rule. The executive officer corps by virtue of its gentlemanly status and its close ties to the political and social *status quo* made it one of the staunchest supporters of the old order. Further, the elite members of the executive often were in the lower range of these great families and sometimes ranked much higher: after all, King George V was a professional naval officer. Hence, the old order of aristocratic rule suited the officer corps well since it enabled men of relatively modest means to have a direct connection by virtue of a royal commission to the pinnacle of the British social system.

## Politics

Being closely associated with the landed establishment socially, politically and culturally, it would have been surprising if the general run of Royal Navy officers had remained unconcerned in the face of reform. Indeed, most naval officers were particularly alarmed by the broadening of the franchise, which by 1918 even included active service ratings, and by the establishment of a new plutocratic elite. Hence, not only was the political power of the older values being challenged but so too was the cultural reach of the elite. And persons of doubtful character often peopled the new plutocracy, in their view. Some of this distrust was channelled into, among other things, anti-Semitism.<sup>20</sup>

British politics were undergoing profound changes as the character of political discourse became more ominous in the fifteen or twenty years before the outbreak of the

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<sup>20</sup> In this regard, see especially Barry Domvile, *From Admiral to Cabin Boy* (London: Boswell, 1947), 82. Admiral Domvile argued: "For the aim of these international Jews is a World State kept in subjection by the power of money, and working for its Jewish masters."

Great War. Although the debates over imperial policy and topics like Irish Home Rule were often loud and bitter, the basic political and social arrangements were largely consensual. Both major parties agreed on many key aspects of policy, such as the need for naval supremacy and limitations on the size and influence of the central government. Yet the growth in the electorate and the increasing appeal of the left-wing Labour Party combined with increasing demands for military and naval expenditure to fracture the political equilibrium. The demand for a larger role for the state in addressing the needs of the downtrodden and the imperative need to pay for imperial defence resulted in a Liberal government under Asquith that wanted to reopen the constitutional framework of the British state. A "People's Budget" that taxed "unearned incomes" and increased death duties on large estates was a more popular option than an attempt to increase indirect taxation, which would primarily have affected those with small incomes.<sup>21</sup>

Needless to say, the old establishment did not react to such changes favourably and attempted to block the government through the Conservative majority in the House of Lords. Only Asquith's threat to create as many new peers as necessary to pass the budget forced the Lords to capitulate in 1911. This had a deep and lasting impact upon the executive officer corps because a significant amount of its prestige and influence rested on the same legitimacy as the Lords. Indeed, it was a rare officer who was a whole-hearted Liberal supporter. For instance, Lieutenant Ralph Seymour caused a stir at a dinner party when he expressed admiration for Campbell-Bannerman and Winston Churchill.<sup>22</sup> Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Commerell (a serving Tory M.P.) a decade

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 335.

earlier was reputed to have regarded Gladstone as “an emissary from hell.”<sup>23</sup> Admiral Sir Charles Fitzgerald sardonically commented, “Liberal Governments have a way of being very liberal with other people’s gear.”<sup>24</sup> One of the pillars of the authority of the officer corps had been rendered impotent.

Nor was the advent of a “radical” Liberal party the only threat to naval officers. Indeed, their authority within the naval establishment was also challenged. As a result of the 1884 Reform Act the size of the electorate trebled; by the end of the First World War women had received the right to vote (albeit with some restrictions until 1928); and active service ratings were able to vote from 1918 onward. By 1910, elements of the electorate, having no political home in either the Liberal or Conservative parties, turned to other voices that could directly subvert the authority of the officer corps.<sup>25</sup> Although the Liberals had gone to considerable lengths to attract working-class voters, there were over forty Labour M.P.’s in the House of Commons, and the Irish Nationalists had made significant inroads and would continue to be thorns in the side of British governments

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Seymour, *Commander Ralph Seymour* (Glasgow: University Press, 1926), 21.

<sup>23</sup> William Goodenough, *A Rough Record* (London: Hutchinson, 1943), 18.

<sup>24</sup> C.C.P. Fitzgerald, *From Sail to Steam. Naval Recollections, 1878-1905* (London: Edward Arnold, 1916), 5, 28. “It will be remembered that the grave and earnest warnings of Lord Roberts... were treated... with spiteful ridicule by our ruling politicians, who wanted money—not for preparations for the inevitable war...but for bribing the most ignorant and most numerous section of the community to keep themselves in power...” See also, “Navy Estimates,” *The Spectator*, 6 March 1909, “It would be little use to provide for old-age pensions for four or five years, and then at the end of that period to be so crippled by an unsuccessful foreign war that there would be no money left to pay those pensions. National insurance must come before any and every other charge.”

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, 8 January 1907. In a letter to the editor, Captain F.W. Lowther sounded the alarm to the encroaching dangers of socialism: “Now, Sir, I will dismiss the interference of Mr. Keir Hardie as unworthy of notice of your readers. That patriot is always to the front with his ignorant arrogance whenever there is something to destroy, no matter what it be - country - Church, State, Army or Navy.”

until the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922.<sup>26</sup> Irish Nationalists were not regarded with any great favour because it often agitated among Irish Catholic sailors in the Royal Navy. For instance, in the naval debates, Mr. Gilhooly, the M.P. for Cork West, pointed out the case of a young Irish sailor who was fatally injured in June 1901. Although the man lay dying for over two hours, there was no attempt to summon a priest to administer the last rites. Gilhooly further noted the case of the Commander of H.M.S. *Collingwood* who referred to Catholic sailors as "Irish pigs."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, many of the senior officers prior to 1914 were either Irish Unionists or had significant family or social connections to the Unionist cause.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Herbert King-Hall referred to Home Rulers as "enemies of my country."<sup>29</sup> To remedy this situation the Admiralty worked with the Archbishop of Westminster to ensure that the spiritual needs of Catholics were met.<sup>30</sup> In a similar fashion in 1905, a bullied midshipman shot and wounded his sub-lieutenant to avoid a gunroom "punishment" and was permitted to withdraw from the service. Swift

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<sup>26</sup> Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. CIII (1902), col. 758.

<sup>28</sup> Ian W. Beckett and Keith Jeffery, "The Royal Navy and the Curragh Incident," *Historical Research*, LXII (1989), 54-62. Officers with Unionist connections included Roger Keyes, David Beatty, George Callaghan, Charles Beresford and C.C.P. Fitzgerald. See also CCAC, WMYS 2/5, Lord Charles Beresford to Wemyss, 7 April 1914; Beresford argued that the First Lord, Churchill, "ought to be hanged" for threatening to send elements of the Home Fleet to deal with the Ulster crisis. Because of the sensitive nature of the situation, Churchill was forced to resort the services of Lewis Bayly "who is supposed to be a great Radical" since other admirals refused point blank any order that would force them to open fire on Ulster Unionists.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert King-Hall, *Naval Memories and Traditions* (London: Hutchinson, 1928), 217.

<sup>30</sup> Although in several occasions there were considerable disagreements between the Archdiocese of Westminster and the Admiralty over the financial arrangements of Catholic Chaplains. PRO, ADM 1/8643/165, Question of Religious Instruction of R.C. Cadets at Dartmouth, 1923. Also, ADM 1/7915 where there is another Admiralty file in relation to the pay of the Catholic chaplain at Gibraltar. In one of the minutes in the disagreement, one officer expressed the suspicion that the Admiralty would be merely making a contribution to enable the R.C. church to proselytize at the Navy's financial cost.



McNeill, the M.P. for Donegal, wondered whether “a midshipman [ought] to be allowed to shoot his superior officer with impunity while a boy who strikes his officer is punished?”<sup>31</sup>

More serious during the war years was the fear that labour discontent would spread from the civilian workforce to naval ratings. Alarm was heightened after the mutinies in the French Army and the German Navy in 1917 and 1918 and with the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Although naval officers were confident they could handle their men, there was still uncertainty. Some argued that since British officers, unlike their foreign counterparts, had more sympathy for their men; the service was largely immune to unrest. However, if the Admiralty and most officers were this assured, they disguised the fact quite well. A great deal of concern was expressed by senior officers that the new scientific training provided for both officers and ratings destroyed the old paternalism, since officers did not know quite what to do with stokers and highly trained ratings.<sup>32</sup> Also, the most serious outbreaks of indiscipline in the service in this period usually involved stokers, who had not received training as seamen, entered at older ages and had been exposed to the “evils” of trade unionism.<sup>33</sup> During the great explosion in union membership in 1889-90, trade union ranks swelled to 1.5 million and by the end of the Great War peaked at eight million.<sup>34</sup> The growing disparity between service and civilian

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<sup>31</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. CXLVII (1905), col. 324. The boy referred to above received 24 strokes of the birch in November 1904.

<sup>32</sup> “The Naval Stoker,” *The Fleet*, III (February 1907), 51.

<sup>33</sup> PRO, ADM 156/157, R.N. Mutinies, 1890-1921.

<sup>34</sup> Eric Hobsbawn, *Industry and Empire*, 165.

pay was exacerbated by high rates of inflation, and this, combined with the drudgery of most naval work and poor living conditions afloat, made the Navy vulnerable.

When the right to vote was extended to soldiers and sailors on active service during the last year of the war there was a concern that labour activism would extend to the lower deck. When the Admiralty proposed to establish a committee to evaluate working conditions and pay in the Navy, Admiral Sir Reginald Hall, the Director of Naval Intelligence warned that “[i]t should be pointed out to the Committee that once the right of representation through a union is admitted, there must be the necessary corollary that such union has some form of control of its members, and that the authority of the Admiralty becomes shared with a body responsible to no one.”<sup>35</sup> During the coal strike in 1921 dissatisfaction among the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Portsmouth Royal Fleet Reserve (R.F.R.) Battalion reached the point where Captain Edward Kennedy asked them to appoint deputations to address their concerns. As a result, a court martial convicted Kennedy of committing an act prejudicial to naval discipline.<sup>36</sup>

Besides being *de facto* members of the elite, serving naval officers, whether holding appointments at sea, at a dockyard or in the Admiralty, were essentially managers of labour involved in preparing for and undertaking naval defence. For this reason it is not surprising that they would be affected by agitation for labour reform.<sup>37</sup> Members of

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<sup>35</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8539/250, “Proposed Duties of the Jerram Committee,” 27 September 1918, minute by W.R. Hall.

<sup>36</sup> PRO, ADM 156/157, R.N. Mutinies, 1890-1921.

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, resistance to the authorities by ratings was vigorously prosecuted, especially so since it was generally not acceptable for officers to “lower” their status by striking a rating. In 1895, Able Seaman Nicholas Gray struck a lieutenant and a commander and was awarded three years imprisonment and was



Parliament carefully monitored the situation in the Navy, and many openly championed the cause of the ambitious on the lower deck. It may very well be true that, as Eugene Rasor has argued, most of the impetus for reform in the past had come from above, but this time the lower deck was the source of much of this unrest.<sup>38</sup> The great advocates of change were men such as Lionel Yexley and Henry Capper who were themselves former members of the lower deck. Although both men were well regarded by officers such as Fisher and Jellicoe, and while their message was essentially one of respectful criticism, opinion was divided over the validity of their complaints. For example, Stanley Colville, Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth in 1918, was less than friendly to Yexley and his ilk.<sup>39</sup>

The Admiralty made officers aware of the potential consequences of their conduct in relation to the lower deck. Although the Admiralty would generally back officers publicly in cases involving breaches of discipline, there were also consequences to the careers of officers if they mishandled men or aggravated matters through "tactless" conduct. Officers could not only be subjected to court martial but could also face legal action initiated by former subordinates. For instance, a former stoker sued Captain Reginald Hall of H.M.S. *Natal* because the man believed that Hall had subjected him to a humiliating

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dismissed from the service with disgrace. "Naval and Military Intelligence," *The Times*, 5 February 1895. See also, CCAC, J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR) 1/5/204, Hedworth Lambton to Fisher, 12 August 1906. Lambton argued that the best method of dealing with ratings who struck their officers was to charge them with cowardice since officers were forbidden to respond in kind.

<sup>38</sup> Eugene Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy: A Social History of the Lower Deck, 1850-1880* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976).

<sup>39</sup> Yexley was a frequent and friendly correspondent with Fisher, see Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought* (3 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1952-1959), volumes 2 and 3; and Henry D. Capper, *Aft from the Hawsehole: Sixty-Two Years of Sailors' Evolution* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927), the preface of which was written by Jellicoe. See also, PRO, ADM 116/1603, Sir Eric Geddes to Stanley Colville, CINC Portsmouth, 19 September 1918.

punishment.<sup>40</sup> Officers could be bound over for criminal charges if the Admiralty determined they had abused their authority as Commander William Annesley discovered in 1890 when he inflicted an unauthorized punishment on a rating.<sup>41</sup>

## The Press

Another significant development that had enormous implications for both British society and the officer corps was the growing strength of the press. In particular, the development of the penny press, perhaps best exemplified by Lords Rothermere and Northcliffe, was crucial. The press proved its potency not merely as an advocate (or opponent) of various political parties but also as an instrument that could prick the pretensions of the powerful, including professional naval and military men. Admiral Sir John Fisher provided an example of both facets. Along with several fellow officers Fisher leaked information in 1884 to W.T. Stead of the *Pall Mall Gazette* that triggered mass agitation for the rapid expansion of the R.N., a growth that culminated in the Naval Defence Act of 1889. On the other hand, when Fisher was First Sea Lord, his battles with critics were frequently conducted in the pages of newspapers and periodicals.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> William James, *The Eyes of the Navy: A Biographical Study of Admiral Sir Reginald Hall* (London: Methuen, 1955), 11-12. Hall had a placard placed around the neck of a stoker who had claimed to be blind. It was suspected at the time that he had been malingering. See also, Barry Domville, *By and Large* (London: Hutchinson, 1936), 199. "It is not possible to-day to erect golden images in Whitehall and say, 'Behold thy Gods' to an admiring Service. The modern bluejacket wants to know a little bit more about these gods before he bows down and worships."

<sup>41</sup> "The *Icarus* Court Martial," *The Times*, 28 May 1890.

<sup>42</sup> "Individual Puffery," *The Times*, 19 February 1907. Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge commented on the practices of Fisher's Admiralty, "The Treasury is probably the last place in which one would look for humour; but even there the joke was passed about that the Admiralty printing bill had in a short time

The advent of a mass electorate and the rise of the popular press were both boons and curses to the Royal Navy. On the one hand, naval officers were in a unique position to offer considerable perquisites to friendly journalists. Such writers were routinely welcomed in social settings ashore and afloat and were often given privileged access to the details of policy through an informal *quid pro quo* arrangement. James Thursfield, *The Times*' naval correspondent, was not only fed information but also invited to contribute a well-received paper at the Royal United Services Institution in 1900 on the training of officers and men.<sup>43</sup> Thursfield's son, Henry, through the patronage of Fisher, was nominated for a cadetship and became a rear admiral on the retired list.<sup>44</sup> Nor was Fisher alone in possessing such contacts, as Lord Charles Beresford showed during the 1882 Egyptian campaign in which he was lionized by the popular press.<sup>45</sup> Contacts also existed on lower levels, where even relatively junior officers acted as both sources of information and go-betweens for their seniors. For instance, Lieutenant Commander Joseph Kenworthy was intimately connected to Lord Northcliffe and became an M.P. in the 1920s.

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increased enormously. So numerous were the printed papers spoken of, in some journalistic circles it was found necessary, owing to their large number, to give them a kind of trade name, 'X's broadsides.'"

<sup>43</sup> James R. Thursfield, "The Training of Seamen," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XLIV (September 1900), 969-1025.

<sup>44</sup> H.G. Thursfield, after retiring from the service became, like his father before him, *The Times*' naval correspondent and also the editor of *Brassey's Naval Annual*. See also Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 137-138, Fisher to J.R. Thursfield, 10 August 1897. In a letter to the elder Thursfield, Fisher, about to become Commander-in-Chief on the North American station, promised to find a place for the journalist's son aboard his flagship, "...You may be sure I will do my best to get your boy into the *Renown* next spring, and if necessary will 'keel-haul' one of her youngsters to make a vacancy!"

<sup>45</sup> Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 1991), 498-510.

The influence of the print media could force Parliament or the Admiralty to consider issues that the Navy would prefer to ignore. For example, after the riot in the Portsmouth Naval Barracks in November 1906, public pressure, fanned by the media, compelled the Admiralty to try Lieutenant Bernard Collard for giving a tactless order. Even after Collard was convicted, the papers jumped on the inconsistency of punishment that only reprimanded Collard while giving several stokers prison terms.<sup>46</sup> In the same way, the print media acted to restrain the Admiralty in situations where its undoubted legal right to act was clear. In 1908, Cadet George Archer-Shee was accused of stealing a postal money order at Osborne College. The cadet was compelled to leave the College when the Admiralty invoked its right, under provisions of the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, to dismiss a cadet for any reason. Press furore and a subsequent court case eventually forced the Admiralty to pay compensation.<sup>47</sup> The papers could also make the Admiralty appear arbitrary and biased, and force it, on rare occasions, to reverse itself. Ample cases exist, for instance, of the Admiralty reducing sentences imposed by courts martial because of public controversy.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, "Admiralty Minute in Regard to Disturbances at Royal Naval Barracks, Portsmouth on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1906," vol. LXX, Cd. 3275 (1906), 73.

<sup>47</sup> This episode became the title of a play and a film: Terence Rattigan, *The Winslow Boy: A Play in Two Acts* (Toronto: Irwin, 1946); see also, Rodney M. Bennett, *The Archer-Shees Against the Admiralty: The Story behind the Winslow Boy* (London: Hale, 1973); PRO, ADM 116/1085A, George Archer-Shee (Cadet) Postal Order Theft, 1908-1911; "Naval Cadet Case," *The Spectator*, 6 August 1910. "We venture to say that no parent can read these facts and reflect that his own son might have been in the position of George Archer-Shee without dismay and horror."

<sup>48</sup> According to Regulations and the Naval Defence Act, the Admiralty was the final court of appeal in naval courts martial and it had the power to confirm and adjust punishments handed down by courts martial. At this time, courts martial were conducted solely by executive commissioned officers and were convened on an *ad hoc* basis. The Portsmouth Naval Barracks riot of 1906 was a case in point where the Admiralty found it politic to reduce the prison terms handed down by court martial. See, BPP, "Admiralty Minute in

Although the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions officially forbade naval officers on active service to write for publication,<sup>49</sup> it was common knowledge that a close relationship existed between officers and journalists employed by "respectable" newspapers. Most of the major dailies had naval and military correspondents who built strong bonds with those in authority. Admiral Sir John Fisher in particular had a veritable stable of friendly writers, including James Thursfield, Arnold White and Gerard Fiennes. Nor was Fisher alone in this regard, for there were plenty of cases where officers entertained "respectable" journalists aboard ships. As well, correspondents routinely accompanied the fleet on manoeuvres; indeed, at one point even Rudyard Kipling wrote a book on this experience.<sup>50</sup> In some instances officers could even try to exercise influence over the ownership of papers. In 1908, for example, Viscount Esher introduced Fisher to a prospective buyer of *The Times* to ensure that he was properly "educated" in naval policy.<sup>51</sup> And in the case of the Fisher-Beresford feud not merely was the naval profession split but also the press.<sup>52</sup>

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Regard to Disturbances at the Royal Naval Barracks, Portsmouth on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> November 1906 and Courts Martial and other Questions Arising Thereon," vol. LXX, Cd. 3275 (1906), 71-73.

<sup>49</sup> PRO, ADM 116/101, "Revision of Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions," article 682.

<sup>50</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *A Fleet in Being: Notes of two Trips with the Channel Squadron* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1899). See also, Frank T. Bullen *The Way They Have in the Navy, Being a Day-to-Day Record of a Cruise in H.M. Battleship Mars During the Naval Manoeuvres of 1899* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1899). Bullen was a correspondent for *The Morning Leader*.

<sup>51</sup> Maurice V. Brett (ed.), *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (4 vols., London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934), II, 199, journal entry for 17 January 1908.

<sup>52</sup> Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Age of Fisher, 1904-1919* (5 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1961), I, 76-78.

It was common for officers on half pay or those who had retired to contribute letters and articles to such papers as *The Times* and the Conservative *Morning Post* under pseudonyms or their real names. Richard Vesey Hamilton, Cyprian Bridge, Gerard Noel and Charles Fitzgerald were all regular contributors to *The Times*. But some retired officers, like Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Hay, never lost their distrust of even the respectable press and consistently refused to contribute letters.<sup>53</sup> Despite strictures against it, active service officers on full pay could sometimes be forgiven for contributing to the press if the cause was deemed suitable. Mark Kerr wrote a letter defending those who had lost their lives in H.M.S. *Victoria* in 1893 and was hauled on the carpet by the First Sea Lord: "Sir Frederick [Richards].... lifted his head and looked at me sternly, and said in a clear, hard voice: 'What do you mean writing to the papers? Don't you know it's against the Regulations?' 'Yes, Sir, I replied, 'but I was so angry at the injustice done to the officers alive or dead who cannot defend themselves, that I wrote it.' To which the First Sea Lord replied: 'You had no business to do it, but I'm damned glad you did.'"<sup>54</sup>

Commentary by active service officers, and especially by ratings, was generally deprecated. For instance, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson not only tried to prevent the distribution of Yexley's magazine *The Fleet* while he commanded the Channel Squadron but also warned sailors publicly against contributing. He followed this by firing a warning shot across Yexley's bows: "...you must be quite aware that in asking Petty Officers and men of the Fleet to communicate information on matters connected with the Naval

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<sup>53</sup> PRO, ADM 7/995, *Naval Necessities*, vol. III, 72-74, Lord John Hay to John Fisher, 22 June 1906.

<sup>54</sup> Mark Kerr, *The Navy in My Time* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1934), 29.



Service to your paper, you are tempting them to disobey Article 12 of the King's Regulations, 1906... and thereby to render themselves liable to punishment."<sup>55</sup> A well-regarded Executive Officer of a battleship stated in a conversation with a Petty Officer about *The Fleet* that "[w]hen he returned them [the papers] he expressed the opinion that any paper which allowed a lower deck rating to criticise the actions of naval officers was a danger to the State and ought to be suppressed."<sup>56</sup> Yexley's campaigning for the lower deck eventually landed him in court. He was sued for libel in early 1914 and was ordered to pay damages in excess of £3,000 (over £160,000 in 2002 currency).<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, some naval officers were well known for playing to the press. Jack Fisher in particular was famous, or infamous depending on one's point of view, for manipulating the press to further his own ends, especially after he became First Sea Lord. As Lord Esher chided Fisher in 1906 regarding his activities: "Therefore pray be Machiavellian, and play upon the delicate instrument of public opinion with your fingers and not with your feet however tempting the latter may be."<sup>58</sup> But others could use these unofficial channels within the service as well. The press campaign orchestrated by the Beresford camp and the "Syndicate of Discontent" seriously undermined the position of individual officers and of the entire Board of Admiralty. The bickering reached the point where Asquith was forced to convene an inquiry into Admiralty policy in 1909 that essentially

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<sup>55</sup> "Editorial," *The Fleet*, VIII (February 1912), 380, quoting a letter from Admiral Sir Arthur K. Wilson to Lionel Yexley, 13 May 1906.

<sup>56</sup> "More Candid Criticism," *The Fleet*, IX (April 1913), 109.

<sup>57</sup> "Kemp v. Yexley," *The Fleet*, X (June 1914), 166-186.

<sup>58</sup> Brett (ed.), *Journals*, II, 199, Lord Esher to Sir John Fisher, 21 October 1906.



finished Fisher and Beresford's active careers.<sup>59</sup> During the war a combination of operational failures and the howl of the press for blood caused the removal or resignation of four First Sea Lords between October 1914 and December 1917.<sup>60</sup> Further, younger officers attempted to use the press to purge what they called the "Old Gang" from the Admiralty. Lieutenant Commander J.M. Kenworthy had extensive contacts with Lord Northcliffe; Captain Herbert Richmond had access through his father-in-law, the industrialist Sir Hugh Bell; and Commanders Reginald Drax and K.G.B. Dewar were known to be friendly with A.H. Pollen, a relentless critic who published in *Land and Water* during the war. As editor of *The Naval Review* Admiral Sir William Henderson used his extensive contacts to bring about drastic reforms in the Admiralty. As Commander Drax wrote to Admiral Henderson, "[i]t is a pathetic thing to descend to the lowest forms of journalism in our efforts to save the country from disaster. [But] there seems to be no alternative."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> BPP, "Report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence Appointed to Inquire into Certain Questions of Naval Policy Raised by Lord Charles Beresford," vol. LIV, No. 256 (1909), 295-303. Members of the "Syndicate" included the conservative press and included such officers as C.C.P. Fitzgerald, Richard Vesey Hamilton, Hedworth Meux (né Lambton), Gerard Noel, Reginald Custance, Edmund Fremantle, Frederick Richards and, of course, Beresford. See, Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Prince Louis of Battenberg, October 1914; Sir John Fisher, May 1915, Sir Henry Jackson, December 1916; and Sir John Jellicoe, December 1917.

<sup>61</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), K.G.B.Dewar Papers (DEW) 2/, Drax to Henderson, 29 August 1917.

## Professionalism

While the widening franchise, the press and changes in the British economy played substantial roles in the transformation of the naval officer, they were also contributors to and amplifiers of the gradual professionalization of the British state and society. As Harold Perkin has argued, at the end of the nineteenth century the “professional ideal” mounted a fundamental challenge to the older class-based establishment.<sup>62</sup> The development of a mass society and the widening impact of the second industrial and managerial revolutions demanded persons who not only possessed specialized skills but also could perform standardized tasks that could be easily integrated into a larger organization. Most of all, the increasing scale of both the opportunities and problems engendered by this process demanded standardized responses. With the development of monopoly capital and the concomitant desire by many to limit the impact of market forces, professional administrative structures were required to provide what Alfred Chandler called the “visible hand.”<sup>63</sup> In a similar fashion, social problems created by industrial capitalism were to be solved by specialized and regularized services to alleviate suffering. The charity of individuals and the Church was no longer capable of meeting the vast needs. Municipal socialism in the organization of basic urban services, such as water

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<sup>62</sup> Perkin, *Rise of the Professional Society*.

<sup>63</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977).

and sewer, electricity and transportation, all fed the demand for professional standards and administration.<sup>64</sup>

Professionalism extended beyond administration and the traditional realm of Church, medicine and courts with the establishment of agreed upon standards in the various fields associated with engineering, although the consensus tended to fragment as each field established its own structures. Predictable standards of technical competence became extremely important, as the loss of life and property associated with faulty workmanship and/or design became higher and the demands on infrastructure and equipment increased. With the construction of vast and expensive projects, rule-of-thumb methods of working out calculations were not only inefficient in the use of material and capital but also downright dangerous. The litanies of railway disasters and bridge collapses were constant features of the nineteenth century. Nor was the Royal Navy immune from these demands, as the introduction of iron and steam forced a shift in the skills required to build and maintain hulls and machinery.<sup>65</sup> Examples of these technical questions literally had life-and-death consequences; while naval personnel might have to face the dangers of war, they definitely would have to face the full rigours of the forces of nature. The loss of the experimental turret ship H.M.S. *Captain* in 1870 brought that lesson home to those who

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<sup>64</sup> T.R. Gourvish, "The Rise of the Professions," in T.R. Gourvish and Alan O'Day (eds.), *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 13-35; John Sheldrake, *Municipal Socialism* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1989); and, Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (1963, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 21-26.

<sup>65</sup> D.K. Brown, *From Warrior to Dreadnought, 1860-1905* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2002); and Paul L. Robertson, "Technical Education in the British Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Industries, 1863-1914," *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., XXVII, No.2 (May 1974), 223-225.

were inclined to forget that fact. Professional standards and qualifications seemed the most efficient way to address the problems of accountability.

The establishment of a plethora of professional organizations marked the 1880s. Professional engineers sought to establish standards of competence and to assert control by legislation over certain fields of work. If an occupational group could persuade the state to extend charter or legislative recognition it would not only improve its status (and its pay) but also the public good. Capitalizing on shortcomings real or imagined, it would attempt to convince the state and the public that its core functions and skills were indispensable to the well being of the community. Nearly every aspect of public life was to be handled by some professional group.

Indeed, most occupations that today are regarded as professional can trace their foundations to this period. For instance, when the British Medical Association began in the 1850s it was instrumental in quickly eliminating “quacks” and assumed a leading role in ensuring that only those meeting certain educational and practical standards were permitted to carry on the business of providing medical services to the general population. Other professions soon joined the trend of forming professional groups to further their collective interests. In 1880, for example, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales was granted a Royal Charter. Professionalism extended beyond the traditional learned professions to occupations connected with the second industrial revolution.<sup>66</sup> It seemed that by the end of the nineteenth century nearly every highly

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<sup>66</sup> The second industrial revolution occurred in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. It was characterized primarily by a change in the scale of industrial enterprises and the vertical integration of industrial production. It was also marked by the development of capital-intensive production particularly in steel, transportation, electrical equipment and chemicals. For its impact on Britain see Peter Bottecelli, “The

skilled body had attempted to organize and establish norms of conduct and performance.<sup>67</sup>

Formal educational qualifications were considered essential in an era when university and college specialty programmes began to appear. This had the effect of reinforcing the status of these new professions. This was a significant shift, since until the mid-nineteenth century British universities were structured to deliver a classical education that prepared a gentleman for a career in the law, civil service or the Church. In the case of Oxford this bias remained ingrained even when universities like Cambridge introduced sciences and engineering. Other British universities were faster to introduce specialized programmes in engineering and related sciences to meet the demands of the industrial economy.

The concept of professionals being “class neutral” also gained prominence.<sup>68</sup> In this sense, all that mattered in developing a profession was the concept of knowledge for serving the public good. Hence, the class association of the officer corps was a problem with which other professions in the naval service had to contend. Indeed, class became a barrier to the effective and efficient performance of the core tasks of the Royal Navy. Education and training became generally more important things in providing a basis for social status. As Robert Buchanan has noted, engineers generally conformed to the existing economic and political culture because their skills became a mechanism for

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British Engineering Press during the Second Industrial Revolution: Responses to Corporate Capitalism,” *Business History Review*, LXXI (1997), 260-286.

<sup>67</sup> W.J. Reader, *Professional Men: The Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 146-166; Perkin, *Rise of the Professional Society*, 17-26.

<sup>68</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), xiv.

social elevation.<sup>69</sup> For instance, in discussing a paper at the Institution of Marine Engineers at Stratford in East London in December 1900, the marine engineer J.R. Ruthven stated: "My contention is that if we take a boy, six or seven of whose immediate forefathers had followed the profession of marine or mechanical engineering, that boy is likely to make a much better engineer than a boy whose parentage has had no connection with engineering."<sup>70</sup> If the sons of engineers were ideally suited to become engineers themselves, would not the same justification be advanced in defence of the old officer class?

It is very interesting to contrast this comment with that of Sub-Lieutenant Reginald Tupper nearly two decades earlier:

Not very long ago it was almost resolved to throw this branch [the Executive] of the Navy open to public competition, but I am glad to say we have not yet arrived at that. I fail to see what benefit would be derived from such a proceeding; as long as we can get a sufficient number of boys, sons of gentlemen and Officers who when they become men, show that amongst them are men with brains sufficient to satisfy the scientific requirements of the Service, what it is the use of introducing a lot of boys whose fathers have no claims whatever on their country?<sup>71</sup>

The perceived shortcomings in the British education system and the education of Britain's skilled elite were matters of deep concern. This was apparent at the end of the century

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<sup>69</sup> Buchanan, *Engineers*, 181.

<sup>70</sup> D.B. Morison, "The British Naval Engineer: His Present Position and Influence on Our Sea Power," *Transactions of the Institute of Marine Engineers (TIME)*, XII (1900-1901), 25, discussions at Stratford on 10 December 1900.

<sup>71</sup> Reginald Tupper "The Best Method of Providing an Efficient Force of Officers and Men for the Navy, including the Reserves," *RUSI*, XXVI (1882), 330; the future Admiral Sir Reginald Tupper commanded a cruiser squadron on the Northern patrol during the First War and was a cousin of the Canadian Prime Minister Sir Charles Tupper.

when Britain was visibly losing ground economically to its continental and American rivals. The alleged effectiveness of the German and American educational systems spawned the argument that Britain needed to take significant steps to rejuvenate a system that could no longer cope with the technological and scientific demands of the time. This seemed particularly relevant to the armed services, since Britain's imperial security was apparently deeply imperilled, particularly with the diplomatic isolation and military setbacks of the South African war.<sup>72</sup> As Gerard Noel wrote in 1909:

I would remind you, that the splendid naval policy, which existed in 1902, had stood the test of centuries, and carried out by Lord Spencer and Mr Goschen when at the Admiralty, had raised the Navy to such a position by 1899, that the threatening European Powers DARED not interfere with us, during our grievous troubles at the Cape, when but for the efficiency and readiness of the Navy, we should undoubtedly have been attacked....<sup>73</sup>

Hence, an efficient naval service commanded by efficient professional officers was an absolute requirement for national safety.<sup>74</sup>

The problem with the armed forces and the Navy in particular was that its officers had few visible professional qualifications. At the British defence colleges, unlike those in the United States or Canada, cadets still emerge without degrees. Although since the 1860s every executive officer passed through the *Britannia* course and was required to pass examinations in seamanship, gunnery, pilotage, torpedo and navigation, the system was often viewed as ineffective and educationally unsound. Between 1870 and 1913, the

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<sup>72</sup> G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 34-53.

<sup>73</sup> CCAC, Chartwell Papers (CHAR)13/1, Gerard Noel to Reginald McKenna, 12 February 1909, emphasis in original.

<sup>74</sup> See, "National Defence," *Blackwood's*, CXLV, No. 881 (March 1889), 436-438.



Admiralty carried out no fewer than six full investigations.<sup>75</sup> All these committees, comprised of naval officers, schoolmasters and civil servants, attempted to make the calling more professional and efficient. The object of these committees was not only to ensure that the naval officer was equipped to deal with the changing face of naval affairs but also to convince the state and society that gentleman executive officers were still specially fitted for the protection of the Empire. The problem encountered, of course, was that the military profession often depended upon distinctly pre-modern values and the intangible characteristics of the officer.<sup>76</sup> The theoretical education required to maintain the status of a modern profession conflicted with the practical training required for a competent sea officer.

The professionalization of British society at the end of the nineteenth century confronted the British naval officer corps with a series of complex and interlocking problems. First, there was an intense desire to avoid what were regarded as the pitfalls of specialization. On the contrary, many officers believed it to be crucial that their profession should be able to maintain considerable detachment even from such important

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<sup>75</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee on the Higher Education of Naval Officers, vol. XXV, C. 203 (1870); Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into the System of Training Naval Cadets on Board H.M.S. *Britannia*," vol. XV, C. 1154 (1875); "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into and Report on the Education of Naval Executive Officers," vol. XIII, C.4885 (1886); "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into and Report on the Training and Examination of Junior Naval Officers," vol. XLII, Cd. 508 (1901); "Reports of Departmental Committee Appointed to Consider Certain Questions Concerning the Extension of the New Scheme of Training for Officers of the Navy," vol. LXX, Cd. 2841 (1906); "Reports of the Committee appointed to Inquire into the Education and Training of Cadets, Midshipmen and Junior Officers of H.M. Fleet," vol. XLIII, Cd. 6703 (1913).

<sup>76</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/26, Memorandum by Lieutenant General Douglas Haig on the Slade Committee Report on the Naval War College, February 1914. "Again, almost all aspects of the art of war are 'theoretical' in time of peace; they only become 'practical' when the actual killing begins. The practical man is the man who has a strong imagination, able to realise the difference between the artificial conditions of peace and the (probably) real conditions of war..."

specialties as gunnery and torpedoes because of the central needs to exercise the command function, maintain the widest possible view, and be able to discern the essential from the trivial.

On the other hand, naval officers had to demonstrate that their claims to leadership rested on more than mere tradition or class prejudice. They were forced to take considerable steps to reassure society that they were the most efficient suppliers of protection. This meant that a considerable amount of specialization had to be risked in order to deal with the dramatic changes in naval affairs. This was especially critical in the years leading up to the Great War.

A problem with the Navy was that it often appeared to be promoting people through graft and patronage, a system that was offensive to the sensibilities of many of those who footed the bill and whose sons were not so favoured. Promotions, especially those seen to be furthering the sons of the nobility and the gentry, began to be questioned in Parliament. As early as 1867, questions were raised about the rapid promotion to Commander of four Lieutenants, and the Admiralty was compelled to issue a return listing the service of these four officers (three of whom were "Honourables"). The average length of their service was 4 ½ years, less than half the duration that most promoted officers endured.<sup>77</sup>

Another target was the system of special promotions such as the advancement of officers serving in the Royal Yachts. Several other avenues of promotion that survived

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<sup>77</sup> *BPP*, "Navy (Promotions) Return of the Services and Sea Time of Commanders Wood, Graham, Fitzclarence, and Yorke," vol. XLIV, No. 179 (1867), 559. These officers were Commanders the Hon. Francis Lindley Wood, James S. Graham, the Hon. George Fitzclarence, and John Manners Yorke.

from the eighteenth century were attracting considerable opposition by the end of the nineteenth. Although the Admiralty also had gradually centralized control over officer entry by taking away the authority of captains and admirals to enter new officer candidates without Admiralty approval, considerable leeway remained. For instance, admirals were still entitled to "haul-down" promotions when they were relieved of their appointments. By custom, such promotions were conferred upon flag lieutenants.<sup>78</sup> Further, Commanders-in-Chief on foreign stations were granted the authority to confirm special promotions due to the death of officers on active service. Further still, when the Admiralty received promotion reports from Commanders-in-Chief and other senior officers about the promotion of officers, it was careful to ensure that the interests of each officer were served. Although promotions were made in the name of the political First Lord, the interests of serving officers could not safely be ignored. In addition, the Naval Lords on the Board of Admiralty, who often returned to sea and desired that their protégés be treated with the same consideration, had a direct interest in ensuring that the interests of the admirals afloat were served. Yet as time went on the process became increasingly bureaucratized and intrusive for officers.

But the move toward a different professional style also came from pressures within the naval service. Officers began to be forced to justify themselves, as did the rising professional classes of late nineteenth-century Britain. As the Navy expanded and demands on personnel increased, promotion prospects dimmed for officers; many of these men began to demand that their education provide a reasonable prospect of a second career if they never were selected off the lieutenants' list. As the traditional appointments

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<sup>78</sup> Flag lieutenants were officers assigned to flag officers to act as their personal assistants.

associated with the landed elite began to dry up, officers cast about for alternative employment. While some could still count on returning to estates and a significant private income, they were increasingly becoming a minority. Besides, often they were the ones to make the jump to higher rank rather than their poorer compatriots.

Naval officers also expressed concern that retired officers were not getting their fair share of employment in the civil service. Similarly, they worried that officers were lagging behind their social peers because they spent too much time immersed in the daily activities of service life. Over time they realized that many officers would not finish their working careers in the Navy but would seek employment elsewhere. This problem was unique to the armed services since the Admiralty found it impossible to promote everyone, and it was equally impossible to keep over-age officers in subordinate positions that required considerable physical exertion. By contrast, in professions such as the law there was always space for mediocre people to find an honourable place until old age without becoming King's Counsels or Heads of Chamber.<sup>79</sup>

This was complicated by the form of education received by naval officers of the period. Officers undertook a portion of their general education under the control of the Admiralty. Unlike the Army or even the Royal Marines, the Navy did not wait for boys to complete their secondary education for a couple of interrelated reasons. First, the curriculum offered at most schools did not teach mathematics and related subjects with sufficient thoroughness. The concentration on the classics was believed to be entirely inappropriate for naval officers, who required practical skills not merely to fight but to

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<sup>79</sup> P.H. Colomb, "Principles of Retirement in the Services, *RUSI*, XXXV (August 1891), 844.

navigate a ship safely. Second, the Navy as a whole believed that in order to train seamen officers properly it was important to recruit them young and get them to sea early enough to become accustomed to the hardships of shipboard life.<sup>80</sup>

The problem the service encountered with this system was the confusion of general and professional education. Since the navy entered boys at an age when their general education remained incomplete, considerable difficulty remained in fashioning cadets into "well-rounded" men while simultaneously fitting them to practice the profession. Writers such as Herbert Richmond, one of the most intelligent and capable officers in the Navy, wrote in 1913 while submitting suggestions for the training of Special Entry cadets that "I want him, in fact, when he goes to sea to have no *instruction* at all. The sea is not the place for instruction, it is the place for training; so soon as he comes on board a ship he should be an officer at once."<sup>81</sup> Hence, Richmond touched the Gordian knot on an issue the Navy struggled over for fifty years: the difficult position of midshipmen being torn between their role as schoolboys and officers. This conflict widened to encompass questions about the naval officer's self-perceptions. The question was whether the officer was a holdover from feudalism where military command was paramount or was he to become a manager and technician?

The essential problem for naval officers of this period was that the old certainties were ruthlessly pruned by dramatic changes in the structure of the British state and the

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<sup>80</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into the System of Training Naval Cadets on Board H.M.S. *Britannia*," vol. XV, C. 1154 (1875), 357.

<sup>81</sup> Just prior to the war, the officer training system was unable to cope with the demands of the fleet and it was decided in 1913, to enter cadets directly from the public schools. See Chapter IV and PRO, ADM 116/1213, "Report of the Committee on the Training of Naval Cadets entered from Public Schools and Elsewhere, 1913." See also H.W. Richmond, "A Suggested Training for Naval Cadets," *Naval Review*, I (1913), 139.

near-systemic attack on the professional culture of the corps. The socio-economic changes in Britain undermined the classes from which officers were largely drawn. The extension of the franchise and the growing weakness of the landed gentry conspired to weaken the authority of the traditional executive branch as well. At the same time, a new paradigm of middle-class professionalism was undercutting the "traditional" culture of command. But the gravest challenge and the bitterest expression of this change in the R.N. was the growth of the engineering profession.

This was particularly pressing because the Navy (aside from private contractors) was one of the largest industrial concerns in Great Britain. It ran dockyards from Sydney to Halifax, as well as the home yards at Portsmouth, Devonport and Chatham. These dockyards employed thousands of men who built and maintained modern warships.<sup>82</sup> The Admiralty employed its own Corps of Constructors and over one thousand marine engineers. It also ran its own Engineering Schools at Keyham and Greenwich and was involved in procurement. Further, as the Navy took up an increasing share of national expenditure, the Admiralty was compelled to find methods to streamline administration and operations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Admiralty was at the centre of controversy over rules of work and professional space between competing occupational groups. In the active fleet alone (exclusive of civil staff and dockyards), the Admiralty employed 128,000 men and cost the Exchequer over £31 million in fiscal year 1907-08.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that Naval Dockyards were among the most efficient builders of warships in the world. The Portsmouth Dockyard constructed the revolutionary all-big-gun battleship *Dreadnought* in just over fifteen months from laying down to completion. See, Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I, 44.

<sup>83</sup> Lower Deck, *The British Navy from Within* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), 11. The administrative history of the Navy in this period has not yet been tackled unlike the age of sail with the work of Daniel Baugh and N.A.M. Rodger. See, Daniel Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole*



At the turn of the century, public disquiet mounted over Britain's international position. It was apparent to policy makers and the wider public that in key economic indicators such as steel production, Great Britain had been overtaken by both the United States and Germany.<sup>84</sup> Further, the failure of military organization in South Africa exposed serious shortcomings in the British defence establishment. If the Navy thought it was immune from such pressures, it was very quickly disabused of that notion. The whirlwind of reforms triggered by John Fisher and the changes in professional training of officers were indicative of the impulse to provide the British state with the maximum return on its defence expenditures. The reinvention of the executive officer corps was part and parcel of these spending reviews.

The advent of modern professionalism was not confined to the executive officer corps but also influenced the development of the Engineering Branch. Engineers, in the view of many executives, were not as much a problem as were the professional engineering organizations, most especially the Institution of Marine Engineers. In that body (along with several others) was to be found the centre of agitation for the disruption of working relationships. Other professional groups also demanded recognition of their importance within the service as the navy faced increasing demands from surgeons, paymasters and others for improved status and prospects for advancement.

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(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965; N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: The Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986). Jon Sumida wrote a 1990 article that addressed the issues surrounding such work, and his *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* of 1989 touches on issues surrounding technology, finance and administration in the years before the Great War. See, Jon Sumida, "Naval Administration in the Age of Fisher," *Journal of Military History*, LIV, No. 1 (1990), 1-26 and Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy*.

<sup>84</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 224-232; Steiner and Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the Great War*, 63-83; and Searle, *Quest for National Efficiency*, 5-15.



The pursuit of education as a form of improvement extended further within the service as the concept of a "career" began to reach further down the ranks. As technical sciences multiplied in the service, ratings required training on a much different basis than in the age of sail. Warrant and Petty officers pressed for changes in pay and working conditions, and elements from the lower deck aspired to middle-class respectability. As one writer put it:

[t]he mechanical knowledge requires a higher intelligence, a larger mental grasp and a more scientific training, than that needed in the days of masts and sails; and consequently the men to be trained in the use of dozens of fighting machines.... need to be drawn from the best educated among our poorer classes. Mere muscular men, which could be picked up by press-gangs ... are no longer the sort of recruits which will win in time of stress and strain...<sup>85</sup>

Confident in the importance of their technical skills and leadership, ambitious enlisted sailors wished for further avenues of advancement, and there were even strident demands for commissions. Lionel Yexley's journal, *The Fleet*, as well as other publications such as the *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal*, campaigned not only for better conditions but also for an eradication of older paternalistic views of ratings. Such attitudes filtered through the fleet and served to limit the freedom of action of the executive officer by curtailing his power to exercise punishment and control over certain types of work.

The most critical task for any professional group was to convince not merely the state but also a significant proportion of the population that it serves a particularly important and pressing social need. In other words, the group must have legitimacy in the eyes of

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<sup>85</sup> *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal*, XV (February 1902), 13.

the public. The most readily available tool to such groups in Britain during this period was science and scientific training. If a group could identify scientific principles behind its work, it could attain a much better position.<sup>86</sup>

However, engineers found the ground more difficult when they encountered other, older groups with pre-existing mechanisms for eliminating the unqualified, that possessed high educational standards and that had the legitimacy of centuries of development. The R.N.'s executive officer corps comprised a profession with considerable power and exalted political connections. Naval officers were *aides de camp* to the monarch; retired or unemployed officers often served as members of Parliament; and the executive branch had powerful allies in both houses of Parliament, in the Press, at Court, and in industry and finance.

This was the situation faced by marine engineers as they attempted to assert control over their sphere of expertise aboard ship. In the merchant marine, engineers were gradually asserting more authority over the machinery of vessels as steam replaced sail. They encountered opposition not so much from ship owners or even the masters of ships as from deck officers who saw the encroachment of the engineer as not only a threat to their authority but also to their continued employment.<sup>87</sup> In the Navy the question took on

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<sup>86</sup> Larson, *Rise of Professionalism*, 2.

<sup>87</sup> For instance, in 1899, in steam vessels over 2000 tons, the average first engineer earned about £18/10 per month while the first officer in the same ship would earn £12. See, *BPP*, "Tables Showing the Progress of British Merchant Shipping," vol. XXVII, No. 218 (1900), 38-9. In regard to conflicts between deck and engineer officers see, H. Campbell McMurray, "Technology and Social Change at Sea: The Status and Position on Board of the Ship's Engineer, circa 1830-60," in R. Ommer and G. Panting (eds.), *Working Men who Got Wet* (St. John's, NL: Maritime History Group, 1980), 44-45; and Conrad Dixon, "The Rise of the Engineer in the Nineteenth Century," in G. Jackson and D. Williams (eds.), *Shipping, Technology and Imperialism* (Aldershot, Hants: Scolar Press, 1996), 231-242.

a different meaning because in many ways the authority of the ship owner was vested in the Board of Admiralty, which was dominated by executive officers. Some were reluctant to accept the propaganda of the professional engineering organizations and openly doubted their overarching pretensions: "One might even hazard the suggestion that the doctrine is a mere piece of trades union bounce, by way of disseminating exaggerated notions of the importance of the engineering cult, and the attainments of its devotees."<sup>88</sup>

Deep and extensive changes in British society had a significant impact on the professional executive officer corps. Most importantly, the second industrial revolution with its concomitant changes in *materiel*, organizational and administrative structure forced a fundamental readjustment of the corps' functions, education and claims to authority. These adjustments acquired urgency and scope through electoral reform, the rise of the popular mass press, an apparent increase in international tensions and a growing financial crisis. In light of these dramatic changes, the executive officer corps was systematically forced to redefine itself at an unprecedented pace. For the first time in a century the professional competence of the corps was under attack, not only from the politicians but also by elements within the service. During the Great War these tensions within the service triggered several responses by which the executive branch moved to reassert its primacy by, among other techniques, the virtual annexation of the engineering branch and the use of history as a form of social control.

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<sup>88</sup> "The Role of the Naval Engineer Officer," *United Service Magazine*, XLII (January 1911), 355.

To argue that Great Britain underwent dramatic social, economic and political changes in the closing decades of the nineteenth century is to state the obvious. These shifts played out in nearly all spheres of British national life, and the naval establishment was not immune. In naval affairs, changes on the surface were obvious as the Royal Navy was transformed from a fleet based upon the wooden walls of the ship of the line to steel and steam. Below the technological surface lay a host of social and political transformations. For instance, in the case of shipbuilding the nature of the skills required to build and maintain iron and steel hulls required vastly different training than those associated with the craft system of constructing wooden vessels. Similarly, the advent of steam machinery quickly showed that the use of "rule of thumb" and pragmatic reworking was not only wasteful but also often dangerous.<sup>89</sup>

The next chapter will discuss the Royal Navy's executive officer corps at the beginning of the period under review. The methods of selection, education and training of officers was particularly well suited to the experience of empire in mid century. However, the key changes that were occurring in Britain soon upset this satisfactory arrangement.

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<sup>89</sup> Brown, *Warrior to Dreadnought*, 5.

### Chapter III

## The Nineteenth Century Officer Corps

I regarded the commanding officer of Her Majesty's men of war as something quite apart from the ordinary run of human beings. I think I imagined them as fierce ogres whom one approached on one's hands and knees like the gilded image of King Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>1</sup>

I know the Queen's Regulations and the Admiralty Instructions from clew to earring, and I tells [sic] you all that the Admiralty can do what they like with us. They can hang us, they can shoot us, and they can drown us. There's only two things they can't do to us: they can't boil us in the coppers and they can't put us in the family way.<sup>2</sup>

It is tempting to regard the nineteenth-century Royal Navy officer corps as a group of eccentrics in a surreal version of Gilbert & Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The literature is full of irascible characters, from "Pompo" Heneage, who sent laundry home from the Pacific, to Prothero "the Bad," who kept his men in abject terror of his ferocious temper, to "Uncle Bill" Fisher, who while in the Mediterranean was the "commodore" of the "fishing fleet" where young ladies could find suitable respectable husbands.<sup>3</sup> This portrait has been reinforced by an historiography that has accused the corps of incompetence and unbending conservatism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taffrail, *The Sub* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Humphrey H. Smith, *An Admiral Never Forgets: Reminiscences of Over Thirty-Seven Years on the Active List of the Royal Navy* (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1936), 31-32. A Coxswain informs young midshipmen of the realities of the Service in the 1890s.

<sup>3</sup> For an example of this, see Geoffrey Lewis, *Fabulous Admirals and Some Naval Fragments* (London: Putnam, 1957). See also R.S. Bacon, *A Naval Scrap Book, 1877-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1940), 16-23; William James, *The Sky was Always Blue* (London: Methuen, 1951), 40; Andrew Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), 19; and James, *Admiral Sir William Fisher* (London: Macmillan, 1943), 5. Admiral James commented that the service was leaving the "eccentric age."

<sup>4</sup> For an extreme example, see Stanley Bonnet, *The Price of Admiralty: An Indictment of the Royal Navy, 1805-1966* (London: Hale, 1966).

The Navy has appeared in this historiography as a musty organization officered by men more concerned with social activities than their work as seamen.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most prominent example has been Arthur Marder, who argued that Admiral Sir John Fisher was the necessary catalyst of institutional change as he crusaded against class prejudice and inefficiency. This image has been reinforced by the literary efforts of disgruntled reformers like Admirals K.G.B. Dewar and Percy Scott and further buttressed by memoirs such as William Kennedy's that thoroughly detail the author's sporting adventures while serving at sea.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary commentators also provided ample grist for the mill.<sup>7</sup>

An example of this type of distortion has been the treatment of Sir John Fisher. More than eight decades after his death, books are still appearing that encapsulate the image the Admiral fashioned of himself.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Fisher's personality has continued to exert considerable influence over historians who have attempted to grasp his impact on

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert King-Hall, *Naval Memories and Traditions* (London: Hutchinson, 1928), 112. "For, after all, no man can be proud of belonging to a dowdy ship any more than to a dowdy woman."

<sup>6</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, *The Navy from Within* (London: Gollancz, 1939); Admiral Sir Percy Scott, *Fifty Years in the Royal Navy* (London: John Murray, 1919); and William Kennedy, *Sport in the Navy and Naval Yarns* (Westminster: Constable, 1902). Memoirs, of course, were written for the wider market and were intended to entertain as well as inform. As Admiral C.C.P. Fitzgerald wrote, "... but it would be a great mistake to suppose that we have nothing else to do, or even that shooting occupied any large proportion of our time. The explanation is that we naturally dwell upon the pleasant incidents in our naval careers, and skip over and try to forget the unpleasant ones." See C.C.P. Fitzgerald, *From Sail to Steam: Naval Recollections, 1878-1905* (London: Edward Arnold, 1916), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed one officer was so exasperated by such a writer he was compelled to respond. A Simple Sailor, "Our Naval Officers: A Reply to Nauticus," *United Service Magazine*, VIII, No. 785 (1894), 726. "This is a very, very sad state of things. That we had neither ships that would swim, guns that would shoot, nor men that would fight, was already known. That the British Admiralty was a very hot-bed of jobbery has been proved over and over again. Does not every schoolboy know that once an officer enters its portals he parts company with his brains and ceases forthwith to conduct himself like a sane person, or even after the manner of an Englishman?"

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Penn, *Infighting Admirals: Fisher's Feud with Beresford and the Reactionaries* (London: Leo Cooper, 2000).



policy. At least one of the reasons is not hard to discern: Fisher's correspondence is *fun* to read; his papers are full of pungent commentary; and he was supremely confident in his views.<sup>9</sup> Also, Fisher's leadership at the Admiralty was pivotal in the development of all aspects of policy in response to changing circumstances. His revolutionary reform in response to and, in some cases, in anticipation of the changing demands on the Royal Navy became a lightning rod for discontent within the officer corps.

Unfortunately, the result is a distorted image of the nineteenth-century Navy. Consequently, historians have tended to paint officers who challenged Fisher as reactionaries. What is forgotten is that while Fisher was busily engaged in presiding over reforms to the officer corps, he was striking at the heart of the unwritten pact between the state and the officer, often in a method that appeared to be arbitrary. Officers who had invested their lives in the service had grave misgivings about some of Fisher's policies.

Furthermore, in the wake of the two world wars, historians have also tended more frequently to evaluate the Victorian Navy in relation to great power conflict. While strategic deterrence was always important, the Navy also existed for other purposes. Naval historians have insufficiently addressed the R.N.'s support of the British imperial

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that many people still claim that Fisher is a neglected figure in British history despite four biographies, two published collections of papers and a multiplicity of studies examining the central role he had in policy. For an example of the flavour of Fisher's own writing, see Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR), 1/4/123, Fisher to Haldane, 3 May 1904: "Ten years experience of the Admiralty and fifty in the navy ... has convinced me that for Reform in the Navy to be effective it must not be previously ventilated. This is contrary to the practice and experience of you shore-going people...You can agitate about it till you are black in the face, it's no use! The First Sea Lord is the only man in creation who can effect the reduction of the Income Tax to 3d. in the pound! And you must let him alone to do it himself! But you must hang on to him like grim death and shout like blazes 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' so as to give him the prestige to carry it through."<sup>9</sup>



enterprise. Still immersed in a Mahanian paradigm, many naval historians seem unable to comprehend that navies exist for more than just fighting battles.<sup>10</sup>

Barry Gough and others have demonstrated, however, that the Navy underpinned the political economy of *Pax Britannica*.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Roger Morriss has gone so far as to argue that the foundations of the modern British state rested on the provision of naval protection.<sup>12</sup> The Navy was vital for duties as diverse as the suppression of the slave trade and piracy, the enforcement of unequal treaties with “lesser” peoples, and the carriage of valuables.<sup>13</sup> These activities required officers to have skills beyond combat.<sup>14</sup> Officers, particularly on distant stations, had to respond to varied conditions that called for political judgment, diplomacy and decisions about the use of force. Mistakes on the periphery that

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<sup>10</sup> A move in the right direction has been made, for instance, in the work of John Beeler, *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era, 1866-1890* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1-5; and Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Barry Gough, “Profit and Power: Informal Empire, the Navy and Latin America,” in R.E. Dumett (ed.), *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism* (London: Longmans, 1999). See also Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and North West Coast Indians, 1846-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984); Mark C. Hunter, “The Political Economy of Anglo-American Naval Relations: Pirates, Slavers and the Equatorial Atlantic, 1819-1863” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Hull, 2003); and Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard, *Steam, Politics and Patronage: The Transformation of the Royal Navy, 1815-1854* (London: Conway Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Roger Morriss, *Naval Power and British Culture, 1760-1850: Public Trust and Government Ideology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 1-2. Linda Colley has gone even further in suggesting moves in defence against an identifiable “other” was a feature of the foundation of “Britishness.” See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 1-9.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Gough, “Specie Conveyance from the West Coast of Mexico in British Warships,” *Mariner’s Mirror*, LXIX, No. 4 (1983), 419-433. Naval Officers collected three-quarters of one percent of the amount of valuables carried which was split between the commanding officer, commander-in-chief and Greenwich Hospital. For an example, see Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 1/6557, where Lieutenant M. Seymour in 1880 received £37/10 for freighting gold between Accra and Lagos in West Africa.

<sup>14</sup> Gerard Noel, “Arma Pacis Fulcra,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XXII, No. 95 (1878), 477. “An executive naval Officer to be perfect must indeed be a marvel. He should combine wisdom with prudence, energy, and decision. He should possess nerve, coolness, fearlessness, and the strongest sense of honour.”

necessitated the deployment of reinforcements at a cost to the Exchequer were deprecated. Still, naval forces were inexpensive relative to alternative means of power projection; they were reliable; and they were omnipresent. As the Radical Parliamentarian W.S. Lindsay wrote in 1870:

We possess elements of power not enjoyed by any other country; these and our wealth are in a great degree the true measure of our strength. Let us then consider how we can best utilise them in the emergency of war, so as to render less necessary the maintenance during peace of an expensive standing force, which interferes with our industry the source of our wealth, and by increased and permanent taxation curtails our means and subsequently our power in the time of need. Voting supplies for war during the time of peace, so far from resembling the premium of insurance which prudent men pay for the protection of their property is a too common argument in favour of extravagant estimates, should, I think, rather be considered as depreciating the value of the stock which we ought to husband.<sup>15</sup>

Lindsay argued that large fleets were an expensive luxury that did not square with Britain's peacetime requirements. The R.N. was an essential part of the liberal imperial order that provided the essential armed support at the lowest cost.<sup>16</sup>

The Royal Navy also served to preserve the political *status quo* and gentlemanly values. As well, it provided a competence for gentlemen at relatively little expense and a career commensurate with their social status. Entry fees and education for aspiring naval officers were comparatively inexpensive compared with the public schools and the

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<sup>15</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, "Navy Officers and Seamen – A Memorandum by W.S. Lindsay," vol. XLIV, No. 238 (1870), 695. Contrast this to later pronouncements where naval strength was "merely a matter of peace insurance." Archibald Hurd, "Coal, Trade, and the Empire," *Nineteenth Century*, XLIV (November 1898), 719.

<sup>16</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Longmans, 2002), 385-386.

Army.<sup>17</sup> The sons of the elite (or those who aspired to the elite) were therefore not only a safe and reliable source of supply for naval leadership but also were subsidized by their families. Hence, the national interest could be upheld at the lowest cost to the state. Only at the end of the century that this paradigm was fundamentally challenged. By then, too, the process of transition to the modern battle fleet and Mahanian doctrine was largely completed in the decade before 1914.

### **The Contract between the Officer and the State**

As Jan Glete has postulated, the basis of the establishment of permanent armed forces in early modern Europe was a set of interlocking contractual relationships between the state, society and the officer.<sup>18</sup> The essence of this in the case of the late nineteenth-century Royal Navy was as follows: the state offered commissions that were limited to select elements of society.<sup>19</sup> These commissions in turn opened the door to command, rank and social position. Naval officers were also given certain visible marks of authority, such as the right to wear a uniform.<sup>20</sup> The state also subsidized the officer's education as a cadet

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<sup>17</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 265. See also Douglas J.C. Compton, "Shortage of Officers in the Army," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, L, No. 340 (1906), 787-788.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4-5. This analysis holds despite the arguments of the Admiralty that no effective contract existed as in the arguments in response put forward by the parents of George Archer-Shee, who had been summarily dismissed from Osborne College in 1910. "Petition of Right: Naval Cadet," *The Times*, 13 July 1910. See also, PRO, ADM 1/8370/65, Memorandum on Retirement and Promotion of Officers, 1914.

<sup>19</sup> Scott W.H. Gray, "On Entry and Training of the Naval Executive," *RUSI*, XXXV, No. 165 (1891), 1153.

<sup>20</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, *Public General Acts*, "An Act to Regulate and Restrict the Wearing of Naval and Military Uniforms, 24 August 1894," 121. Section 3 of the Act imposed sanction on improper use of the uniform. A person not so entitled who wore the uniform "under such circumstances as to be likely to

and bore the costs of subsequent training. Honourable employment and a retaining fee in the form of half pay for unemployed officers were provided. Further, the state held out reasonable chances of promotion, the possibility of distinction and the chance to be knighted or even ennobled. At the end of their active service life, officers also received a pension for life.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the naval profession was a career where an officer could exercise judgment in the formation and execution of policy. It also confirmed his gentlemanly status and bound him to the British political structure.<sup>22</sup> This was reinforced by giving officers the power in effect to be lawmakers and judges within their own service and to rule ratings with semi-feudal authority. There was also the power of patronage that enabled influential officers to find places for their sons or those of their friends. Naval officers generally regarded themselves not as servants of the state but as semi-independent gentlemen providing an essential service to the community in exchange for fees.

Benefits included the opportunity to pursue gentlemanly activities such as hunting and to travel the world at public expense. In the words of Admiral Sir William James, "I

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bring contempt upon that uniform or dress" committed an act punishable by a £10 fine or thirty days imprisonment.

<sup>21</sup> Retirement pay for a lieutenant with maximum seniority amounted to about £300 per annum, which was a substantial amount considering that the average British skilled worker might at best receive £100 per annum; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London: Penguin, 1969), 154. Considering the expenses required to reflect the status of a commissioned officer meant that it was difficult to make ends meet, particularly if the retiree was placed in the situation of having to pay for the education of children and had to maintain a "suitable" home. Indeed, this benefit was regarded as the foundations of the capacity of the officer corps. "Admiralty," *Reasons for an Inquiry into the Position of the Executive Officers of the Royal Navy* (Westminster: Thomas Brettell, 1861), 3. "In order to secure zeal and efficient, it will be necessary to ensure to officers *reasonable promotion, frequent promotion, suitable pay, and an adequate retirement.*"

<sup>22</sup> See Henry T. A. Bosanquet, "Advantages of the Service," in Ernest J. Felix, *How to Enter the Royal Navy* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1899), 1-3. The author of the article was a naval lieutenant and son of Admiral Day Bosanquet, who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Squadron.

do not think such a perfect balance of work and play could have been maintained in any other profession. Officers and men were always busy as bees during working hours but their interludes for relaxation were frequent and they were carried free of charge, to places beyond the reach of any one but a millionaire yacht-owner.”<sup>23</sup> Officers also had the privilege of duty-free liquor.<sup>24</sup> A naval life was adventurous, and officers epitomized the self-confidence of British imperialism.<sup>25</sup> Officers were not only officials of empire but also members of the elite aboard ship. As well, they were able to experience status and power that would not otherwise have been available. On the eve of the Great War, when not even the landed aristocracy could have their workers flogged, officers still had this power in the Navy (albeit restricted to non-whites).<sup>26</sup>

In exchange for these benefits, the naval officer had to accept a specialized education that limited opportunities for outside employment.<sup>27</sup> The junior officer had to endure low pay relative to the mandatory mess fees, uniforms and incidental fees such as

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<sup>23</sup> James, *Sky Was Always Blue*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8204, Customs and Excise to Admiralty, 3 May 1910.

<sup>25</sup> For an example, see Ernle Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence* (London: Heinemann, 1942), 37. In company of foreign officers, a groups of RN officers boisterously sang the following:

“We are getting it by degrees, we are getting it by degrees,  
We get a bit here, we get a bit there,  
The Union Jack is everywhere,  
And now and then we give it a gentle squeeze.  
We haven’t got the whole world yet but we’re getting it by degrees.”

<sup>26</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8404/450, “Refusal of Arabs and Somalis to work, 1914.” On the Cape Station Arab and Somali stokers refused to serve in the Atlantic as they argued that their terms of service bound them for employment in the Indian Ocean. Admiralty approval was quickly obtained to employ the cat. Furthermore, a pattern of cat o’ nine tails was kept aboard H.M. Ships in 1879; ADM 116/183, “Corporal Punishment, the Cat – Pattern and Supplies, 1879;” and ADM 1/7918, Abolition of Flogging in Naval Prisons, 1906.

<sup>27</sup> For an example see, J.K. Laughton, “Naval Education,” *RUSI*, XXVI, No. 115 (1882), 362, comments by Commander Dawson.



laundry and those associated with “gentlemanly” pursuits.<sup>28</sup> Overseas commissions and financial strictures meant that for junior officers, marriage was generally unaffordable. Officers were also expected to risk their lives in the service. For instance, of the January 1885 *Britannia* term of fifty-two cadets, twelve were killed in action or died while on active service. Rear Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot was killed at Jutland, another man lost his life at Coronel in November 1914, a third perished when his ship blew up at Scapa Flow in 1917, two others died by drowning, and the remainder passed away due to illness or other causes.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in the *Victoria* disaster of 1893, eight out of fourteen embarked midshipmen were lost.<sup>30</sup> There was also risk ashore. For example, during the Egyptian intervention of 1882 Colonel Arabi’s forces captured Midshipman Dudley de Chair.<sup>31</sup> Mundane duties such as coaling were also fraught with risk to junior officers, as several were killed or severely injured.<sup>32</sup> Nor were senior officers insulated from danger; Commodore James Goodenough who was killed in a scuffle with Pacific islanders while serving as Commander-in-Chief on the Australian Station.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the danger involved

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<sup>28</sup> A.B. Tulloch, “The Education and Professional Instruction of Officers,” *RUSI*, XVII, No. 74 (1873), 767. “It is certainly impossible to appreciate too highly that peculiar training at public schools which develops those qualities so requisite in an Officer, viz, gentlemanly feeling and manner, and a love of amusements requiring physical strength and skill...”

<sup>29</sup> Royal Naval Museum (RNM), Naval Review Papers (NRP), Record of January 1885 *Britannia* Term.

<sup>30</sup> Dudley de Chair, *The Sea is Strong* (London: Harrap, 1961), 99, Lieutenant Morgan Singer to de Chair, 27 June 1893. A mistaken order issued by Vice Admiral Sir George Tyron resulted in the collision of his flagship *Victoria* and the *Camperdown* off the coast of Lebanon.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>32</sup> *BPP*, “Particulars of the More Serious Accidents Which Have Occurred During Coaling of H.M. Ships in the Years 1910, 1911, and 1912,” vol. LIII, Cd. 6634 (1912-1913), 433-435.

<sup>33</sup> William Goodenough, *A Rough Record* (London: Hutchinson, 1943), 10.

in a naval career was seen as a justification of the status of the commissioned officer.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, there was no guarantee of promotion after lieutenant: there was perhaps a one-in-three chance of selection to the rank of commander, and another gauntlet was faced in the race for the rank of captain. Once an officer became a captain, he would advance automatically to flag rank through seniority provided he obtained command experience.

In short, there was a bargain between the state and the officer (or his family) who subsidized his own service in exchange for prospects for advancement and prestige.<sup>35</sup> It should not be surprising that officers who had endured hardships and still managed to secure promotion were deeply concerned about changes in the conditions of service. This was exacerbated because the social prestige of rank carried into retirement and also affected their power of patronage to advance the careers of those in whom they were interested.<sup>36</sup>

## Self-Perception

Nineteenth-century naval officers perceived themselves as professional seamen. But the professionalism they asserted was neither narrow nor overly specialized. They did not

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<sup>34</sup> Lionel Dawson, *Sound of the Guns: Being an Account of the Wars and Service of Admiral Sir Walter Cowan* (Oxford: Pen in Hand, 1949), 3. Indeed, Captain Edmund Fremantle had to admonish his subordinates for risking their lives in attempts to rescue those who had fallen overboard. PRO, ADM 1/6557, Fremantle to Admiralty, 10 February 1880, "I have at the same time pointed out to the Ships' Company that wild and reckless risk of their own lives by jumping overboard is as reprehensible as it is useless, and that only under certain circumstances should a good swimmer throw himself into the water, when he should do so at the right time without any hesitation."

<sup>35</sup> Gray, "On the Entry and Training of the Naval Executive," 1153.

<sup>36</sup> E.A. Inglefield, *Words of Advice to Young Naval Officers* (Liverpool: Webb & Hunt, 1864), 100, "When a man toils for an object when his hair has become sprinkled with gray [sic], and his eyes dimmed by long service... he thinks highly of the prize he has won; he guards it carefully, and having long watched for it, he knows all its value and attributes."



think of themselves merely as warriors but also as representatives of their country. One historian's commentary seemed to compare the nineteenth-century Navy to Starfleet in the popular television series, *Star Trek*.<sup>37</sup> Like Captain Kirk, Royal Navy officers were to be men of the world who were equipped to deal with questions of war and peace. For this, professional standing was obviously required, as was a level of social refinement. Status was needed to deal with diplomatic problems. Indeed, much of Britain's stature in the wider world was based on what Admiral Fitzgerald called "...that very real but rather indescribable thing we call British prestige."<sup>38</sup> The naval officer was the embodiment of that standing on the world stage.

Wide knowledge of the world and assurance of position were vital. In a lecture before the Royal United Services Institution in 1871 Captain James Goodenough protested against what he saw as the over-specialization of naval officers through a narrow concentration on the study of mathematics on board *Britannia*. He also expressed concern that the same thing would happen at the new Royal Naval College at Greenwich, which was then under discussion.

It is weakening the desire for knowledge and self-improvement in naval Officers; it is tending to narrow and circumscribe the idea of responsibility of a naval Commander for all things coming within his ken, and to lower his conception of his own position from that of a representative of his country in all parts of the world, an agent of her policy, and a guardian of her commerce, to that of being a mere executive tool whose only argument is force.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Andrew Gordon, "Discussion of the Papers Written by Geoffrey Till and Eric Grove," in James Goldrick and John Hattendorf (eds.), *Mahan is not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1993), 260-262.

<sup>38</sup> Fitzgerald, *Sail to Steam*, vii.

<sup>39</sup> James Goodenough, "The Preliminary Education of Naval Officers," *RUSI*, XV, No. 64 (1871), 339-340.

Hence, the characteristics required of naval officers were of a different order than merely the ability to employ violence. The executive branch conceived of itself as the embodiment of British sea power and almost had a sense that professionalism and the amateur ideal of the English gentleman could co-exist there.

The personal qualifications expected of British naval officers broadly matched those of "gentlemen." According to Admiral A.P. Ryder, these included cheerful submission to superiors; self-respect; independence of character; kindness and protection of the weak; readiness to forgive offence; desire to conciliate the differences of others; and unflinching truthfulness.<sup>40</sup> Current fashion is to scorn such pronouncements, but there is little doubt that officers, for the most part, were convinced of their validity. Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key, speaking to a RUSI meeting in 1874, reinforced the importance of such intangible qualifications:

I should be very sorry if young Officers should take away from this theatre the idea that 'the honour of our flag' is a mere sentiment.... The real meaning of that expression in time of war is far deeper; it is the first thing to be considered. The first thought of a Commanding Officer in any difficult situation should be, What will be for the "honour of our flag?" Having considered that, and having provided for it, he may look for the safety of his ships, and after that the safety of his men's lives.<sup>41</sup>

In this way gentlemanly characteristics could be perpetuated and a balance struck between the individual and the collective. While an officer was required to submit to his

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<sup>40</sup> Ryder, "Higher Education," 738.

<sup>41</sup> J.K. Laughton, "The Scientific Study of Naval History," *RUSI*, XVIII, No. 79 (1874), 535-536, comments by Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key.

superiors, he was required to be aware of his position as a holder of the Queen's commission. He was expected to exude certain qualities, to have a strong sense of personal honour and to possess physical and moral courage.<sup>42</sup> H.W. Richmond once quoted an old admiral to the effect that "an officer who don't [sic] value his own honour is not the likeliest man to defend the honour of his country."<sup>43</sup> The example of a Lieutenant Brand was a case in point. In the 1860s, Mr. Buxton, M.P. publicly attacked Brand's role in a court martial proceeding. In response, Brand dashed off a threatening letter to the M.P. and was compelled to explain his actions by the Admiralty. Brand wrote:

In the report of Mr. Buxton's speech, I read statements respecting myself which stung me to the quick, accusations of inhumanity, want of personal honour, and suggestions of levity and unfairness of my conduct as president of the Court Martial, which, spoken in the most public place in the world, where I could not answer him, in my absence, and under the circumstances of great public excitement, wounded and irritated me to such an extent, as to make me overstep the bounds of propriety, and to resent what I should have left unnoticed.<sup>44</sup>

Also important was that these gentlemen who inhabited the quarterdeck had at least the trappings of "independence." This standing was established by the financial requirements of a naval career, which acted as filters to ensure that only suitable persons were recruited. Indeed, for the most important posts private income was a virtual

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<sup>42</sup> Edward Bradford, *The Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Knyvet Wilson* (London: John Murray, 1923), 97. On the day that Admiral Wilson received the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in action, his diary read: "June 6 – Docked ship, received VC."

<sup>43</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), H.W. Richmond Papers (RIC) 7/1, Richmond to Henderson, 18 February 1919

<sup>44</sup> *BPP*, "Lt. Brand – Copy of Recent Correspondence Between the Admiralty and Lt. Brand, R.N.," vol. XLIV, No. 108 (1867), 513.

requirement. Heavy costs associated with social duties and hospitality could make deep inroads into an officer's pay. This was institutionalized in the form of monthly mess fees, uniforms, kit and equipment. In many cases officers even rented cabin furniture from the Admiralty.<sup>45</sup> Until 1903, they were also required to pay stamp duty on their commissions, not just upon promotion but also on every occasion they were posted to a new vessel.<sup>46</sup> Further, there were extraneous expenses if an officer engaged in sport ashore. Fees, especially in the junior ranks, could easily exceed an officer's total pay. Throughout the period, there were several cases where officers turned down highly prized billets because they could not afford to fulfil the associated social obligations.<sup>47</sup>

This capacity to celebrate both the collective and the individual provided considerable scope for the exercise of personal initiative. This, however, eroded rapidly when the organization of the Navy shifted by the turn of the century to a concentration on great power conflicts and the consequent centralization of control under the leadership of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby. Clockwork-like tactics, combined with the mechanization of the fleet, disturbed many officers. Together with the importance of fitting a certain social profile, the result was a disease that Admiral Godfrey called "Very Senior Officer Veneration" which, in his view, resulted in all sorts of stupidity.<sup>48</sup>

While having a sense of position gave officers considerable confidence, it unfortunately also could lead to considerable arrogance. One story that circulated about

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<sup>45</sup> PRO, ADM 116/315, Mess Articles and Furnishing of Officers' Cabins, 1890; and ADM 116/326, Furnishing of Officers' Cabins, 1891.

<sup>46</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7712, Treasury to Admiralty and War Office, 9 July 1903.

<sup>47</sup> E.R. Fremantle, *The Navy As I Have Known It, 1849-1899* (London: Cassel, 1904), 142.

<sup>48</sup> CCAC, GDFY 1/1, Autobiography of J.H. Godfrey, 41.

Rosslyn Wemyss concerned his rejection in rather forceful terms of First Lord Reginald McKenna's offer to make him his private naval secretary.<sup>49</sup> When the First Lord hauled Wemyss on the carpet, McKenna informed him that he could be broken. Thereafter "Wemyss drew himself up and surveyed little McKenna as if he were some curious insect. 'You dirty little lawyer... how dare you speak to me like that? I shall certainly report your insolence to the king.'"<sup>50</sup> Whether or not the story was accurate (most likely it was not), it still reflects the attitudes of many officers. Lesser mortals such as colonial governors could also be handled roughly. Reginald Bacon recalled one admiral refusing a governor's invitation to dine on the Queen's Birthday on the pretence of having a headache. While in the ordinary course of affairs a headache might impede someone from fulfilling their social obligations, it is doubtful if even a person as exalted as a flag officer could determine that he would have such a condition two weeks in advance.<sup>51</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the prestige of the service increased dramatically as public attention became increasingly dominated by the "new imperialism" and the significant place that fleets played in advancing the influence of states. Further, in Britain the Navy capitalized on the growing prestige of the monarchy. As the executive officer corps became increasingly identified with the Crown and the aristocracy, however, it proved more difficult to sell the image of professionalism to the general public.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Reginald McKenna was First Lord of the Admiralty between 1908 and 1911.

<sup>50</sup> A. McDermott, "Some Naval Characters I have Known," *Mariner's Mirror*, XLV, No.4 (1958), 284.

<sup>51</sup> Bacon, *Naval Scrap-Book*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 264-280.

Although many changes had occurred, the service remained a conservative force in British society. On the other hand, it attempted to centre itself on a deliberately defined, in some ways invented, tradition that suited those who dominated the Navy. This asserted the authority and prestige of the officer corps in the restless closing decades of the century.

One of roots of this prestige resided in the concept of service and personal loyalty to the Crown. As the actual power of the ruler continued to wane, the social prestige of the monarchy was elevated as a supposedly unifying element in a diverse empire. David Cannadine examined the scope of this shift in a recent book in which he argued that social class was at least as important to imperial policy-making as race.<sup>53</sup> Regardless, the corps was part and parcel of the concept of imperial prestige. By the end of the century the possession of a naval education was considered normal for royalty, and the connection to the officer corps was cemented. For example, Prince Louis of Battenberg, a relation by marriage to the Royal Family, became an admiral and First Sea Lord before being hounded out of office during World War I.<sup>54</sup> Even more important was the education in the 1870s of Princes Albert Victor and George at *Britannia*, where they received the standard education of an executive officer. Prince George, who became second in line to the throne upon the death of his older brother in 1892, pursued an active naval career. When he became King in 1910, he was deeply interested in the Navy and maintained a professional connection with it throughout his reign. His two sons, Edward and Albert

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<sup>53</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> The family name was changed to Mountbatten in 1917 and Prince Louis took the title Marquess of Milford Haven. His son, Lord Louis Mountbatten also became an Admiral of the Fleet and First Sea Lord in the 1960s. PRO, ADM 1/8490/132, Prince Louis of Battenberg – Relinquishing of Titles, 1917.



(the future Edward VIII and George VI), also entered the Navy.<sup>55</sup> This royal connection did much to cement the prestige of the officer corps. This was enhanced further by the creation of the post of Naval Aides-de-Camp (A.D.C.) to the monarch. Promising captains were made A.D.C.'s, and a senior admiral, if not the First Sea Lord himself, was usually granted the title of First and Principal A.D.C. These court appointments required considerable private means, and officers who were less well off were often given the option of accepting a G.S.P.<sup>56</sup> The benefit of this system was obvious: the officers involved had direct access to the monarch, whose influence in matters relating to the service remained considerable as late as World War I. The support of Edward VII to some degree underwrote the reforms introduced by Fisher in the first decade of the twentieth century. George V prevailed in a battle with Winston Churchill in 1912 when the First Lord attempted to have two dreadnoughts of the *Queen Elizabeth* class named *Pitt* and *Cromwell*. When the King refused to countenance a ship named after a regicide, Churchill backed down.<sup>57</sup> The monarch also had some influence in distributing commands in the higher echelons of the service and could help foster the careers of those he favoured.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the future George VI was a Midshipman in the Grand Fleet during the Battle of Jutland in 1916; for a record of the future monarch's service, see PRO, ADM 1/24712.

<sup>56</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8385/119, Good Service Pensions, Memorandum by C. Walker, Head of CW Branch, Admiralty, 18 December 1913. "It is understood that Captains are allowed to express their wishes privately as to their choice between a G.S.P. and an A.D.C., and therefore, other things being equal a G.S.P. generally falls to the Officer who is less well off."

<sup>57</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/11, Lord Stamfordham to Winston Churchill, 4 November 1912; and *ibid.*, Minute by Prince Louis of Battenberg on the naming of Battleships, 6 November 1912. A ship named *Cromwell* might also have inflamed Irish public opinion.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, 215-243.



Personal loyalty often tended to be conflated into support for the monarchical form of government. While he was First Lord, Churchill, after prompting from the king, refused permission for the Training Squadron to visit Lisbon, since Portugal had just undergone a revolution that had included the assassination of a monarch. "I think it very insulting to the Officers and Men of His Majesty's Navy," Churchill wrote, "that they should be forced to interchange courtesies and hospitalities with a Government of ruffians who have murdered one King and driven out another."<sup>59</sup> Personal connections to the monarch permitted officers to think of themselves as above politics and as guardians of the national interest.<sup>60</sup>

The rising importance of the navies of other countries permitted the corps to feed off its prestige, since it would have been intolerable for British officers to have lesser status than foreigners. With the publication of Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* and the growth in importance of imposing battle fleets, other navies began to try to emphasize their own prestige. Kaiser William II, in particular, doted on his navy and often invited Royal Navy officers to dine aboard his yacht. Taking advantage of his honorary rank as a British Admiral of the Fleet, the Emperor sometimes carried out snap inspections of British warships. This enhanced image of the Navy served a multiplicity of

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<sup>59</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/13, Winston Churchill to First Sea Lord, 10 September 1912.

<sup>60</sup> In practice, naval officers generally gravitated toward the Conservatives and Unionists rather than to the Liberals. A considerable number of retired naval officers served in Parliament throughout this period, including Commander Caryl Bellairs, Rear Admiral Edward Field and Admiral of the Fleet Sir Hedworth Meux. Lord Charles Beresford, the darling of the Unionists and the Navy League, was the only officer still on the active list who served in Parliament between commissions; with the exception of Bellairs, all were either Conservatives or Unionists. After the war, political activity became somewhat varied for retired officers from Vice Admiral Kenneth Dewar running for Independent Labour to Admiral Sir Barry Domville being friendly with Nazis in the 1930s.

purposes for the executive branch, but most important it gave them elevated prestige within the naval service and increased their hold on the levers of power.

Connected to patronage was the conception of naval officers as semi-independent contractors. Officers never viewed themselves as employees of the state or mere executive agents of government policy. Rather, they believed that they represented the elite of British society and took considerable pride in being "above" the ordinary. The very structure of the service helped to foster the illusion of officers being independent of the government that employed them. Although most officers were forced to live for the most part on their pay, the illusion of independence from state interference was preserved by a number of traditions. Officers continued to pay mess fees, to pay for their own outfit and kit and even to rent cabin furniture while at sea. As well, their parents or "friends" paid a substantial share of the cost of their education and training. All this helped to maintain an aura of independence.

Indeed, one of the chief obstacles that the Admiralty encountered in regulating the officer corps was the common perception that officers were not merely employees of the state. Officers could resign their commissions or refuse appointments, and they enjoyed considerable latitude while serving at sea. In exchange for tolerating sometimes infrequent employment, poor pay and indifferent living conditions aboard ship, they came to value other non-tangible rewards. These included a suitable education, the opportunity for promotion, independent command, prize and freight money, duty-free liquor, a good pension and prestige. The Navy, although a hard life that offered little financial reward, provided a form of honourable employment. Altering terms of service and playing with the rules of retirement were delicate tasks. Since the Navy was dependent on persons of

semi-independent means to provide sons to serve as officers, it had to balance the needs of the service, the expectations of the officer corps and financial considerations. The constant need to balance these forces acted as a brake on the Admiralty's ability to alter the working conditions of naval officers. Even as late as the First World War one of the major impediments to the effective introduction of lower-deck commissions was the inability of the Treasury to increase the pay of junior officers. The Royal Navy could not compel the sons of gentlemen to serve but had to extend certain financial and psychic rewards to entice suitable men.

### **Selection, Promotion and Patronage**

Entry into the executive officer corps, to use a Victorian turn of phrase, was by appointment only. The obvious qualification was that a proposed candidate should be a British subject. But according to the 1893 Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions he was also to be of pure European descent.<sup>61</sup> Further, candidates for a cadetship had to be nominated by either the First Lord or a senior naval officer. The difficulty of obtaining a nomination was a constant problem even for prominent families attempting to place their sons in the Navy. For instance, when Oswald Frewen, a cousin of Winston Churchill, joined a naval crammer without a nomination his mother was

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<sup>61</sup> PRO, ADM 116/10, Revision of QR&AI, 1893. This rule was not relaxed even during the pressing times when in 1916 an Eton- and Oxford-educated Indian attempted to obtain a temporary RNVR commission; ADM 1/8545/313, Question as to whether British Subjects of Parsee Origin are eligible for temporary Commissions, 1916. However, a white American, whose parents had been British subjects prior to becoming American citizens, was considered eligible for Dartmouth in the regular system of entry; ADM 1/8653/258.

forced to intervene with the First Lord directly.<sup>62</sup> There were also places reserved for the sons of officers who died on active service, colonial gentlemen recommended by the Colonial Office and promising cadets from the merchant service training ships on the Thames and Merseyside. For the most part these special appointments were exempt from the provisions of the competitive examinations introduced in the 1870s.

Prior to that time, officers could nominate cadets who, after a cursory examination, were entered directly to the training ship *Britannia* and then sent to sea to prepare for their lieutenant's exam. Yet even after passing out, they would have to wait to gain promotion until a vacancy opened on the lieutenants' list through death, promotion or retirement. In the 1870s it became apparent that closer management of the executive list was required, and the Admiralty searched for a way to reduce the numbers of entrants so that they did not languish as subordinate officers for indefinite periods. Another concern was that whatever was put in place should not interfere with the capacity of officers to advance the careers of their friends. The mechanism eventually adopted was the use of a competitive examination set by the Civil Service Commission (CSC), which managed the entry system from 1886 to 1902.<sup>63</sup> While candidates still had to be nominated, the Admiralty was permitted to set the number of cadets to be recruited based upon calculations of future requirements. Hence, executive privilege was preserved, and the needs of the service were met. The system permitted the nomination of as many as

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<sup>62</sup> Frewen, *A Sailor's Soliloquy*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> The Civil Service Commission was established in 1855 to regularize entry and promotion with the British civil service. It laid down standards and managed the system of competitive examinations. See Great Britain, Reference Division, Central Office of Information, *The British Civil Service* (London: H.M.S.O., 1974), 3-4.

140 candidates every six months, but since over half in practice were made by the First Lord the process soon aroused the disapproval of many officers because, in their view, it politicized the selection process.<sup>64</sup>

One "problem" with the system was the advent of the "crammers," private institutions (often run by former naval instructors) where boys desiring a naval career were sent to prepare for the competitive examinations. Although the crammers were expensive, they were viewed as necessary evils because most schools did not provide the necessary background in the sciences and applied mathematics.<sup>65</sup> A love-hate relationship with these establishments soon developed that lasted until the introduction of the Selborne Scheme of 1902. In the opinion of many officers who passed through this system, the crammers emphasized learning by rote and set young cadets into a "mental groove" that limited adaptability to changing professional circumstances.<sup>66</sup> Despite such criticisms, the Admiralty was willing to accept the system since the exams conferred legitimacy by making it appear that officers were being recruited on merit in a visible and open

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<sup>64</sup> A.P. Ryder, "The Higher Education of Naval Officers," *RUSI*, XV, No. 65 (1871), 736. It would be laughable to presume that politics had not played a role in the selection previously. For instance, John Fisher received his nomination from Admiral Sir William Parker, the last of Nelson's "band of brothers." He was then required to write a simple examination involving notation and basic arithmetic. R.S. Bacon, *Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (2 vols., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929), I, 5-6. Further, promotion and selection for desirable billets was also on the basis of patronage. Admirals and captains had considerable latitude to select their staff and subordinate officers, a practice that was somewhat restrained later in the period.

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, in 1890, crammers could cost upwards of £210 per annum. N. Bowden-Smith, "Entry and Training of Naval Officers," *RUSI*, XXXV, No. 155 (1890), 7.

<sup>66</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty to Inquire into and Report on the Education of Naval Executive Officers," vol. XIII, C. 4885 (1886), 339.

process.<sup>67</sup> Executive officers still exercised control, but candidates had to demonstrate that they were worthy of the appointment.

While parents were still forced to make a financial contribution, officers became self-supporting at a fairly young age (presuming they remained unmarried).<sup>68</sup> After entry, cadets spent only fifteen months to two years at formal schoolwork and could reach commissioned rank as early as age nineteen or twenty. Hence, the Navy's financial bar was set lower than that of the public schools and in most cases that of the army while still offering an honourable profession. Nonetheless, the cost was substantial enough to prevent most families from sending their sons to be naval officers. Given the improved prosperity of the Victorian period and the multiplicity of developing professions, a naval career was a way to dispose of a son that would enhance social respectability but still restrain costs. In other words, the Admiralty provided a form of social capital in exchange for a financial investment by parents. Despite the fact that this investment was relatively modest, it was not inconsiderable: between 1863 and 1882, such contributions more than paid for all the capital costs of the establishment of *Britannia* as a training ship.<sup>69</sup>

After the advent of the Selborne Scheme in 1902, these fees increased. In the nine years it took the Navy to shape a young boy into a finished watch-keeping lieutenant in

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<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it was nearly a quarter of a century later before the crammer system was eliminated through the Selborne Scheme.

<sup>68</sup> E.M. Moore (ed.), *Adventure in the Royal Navy: The Life and Letter of Admiral Sir Arthur Moore, 1847-1934* (Liverpool: E.M. Moore, 1964), 24. Midshipman Moore wrote that "[i]n two years from now I pass for sub-lieutenant, and shall earn £95 per annum – and when I get my promotion 18 months or two years after I shall get just double that – which will be a tidy sum to get at 22. Better than a poor curate in a small village."

<sup>69</sup> *BPP*, "Return of Naval Cadets," vol. XL, No. 311 (1882), 457. Parents' contributions amounted to £120,832, and the total capital cost of the college was £101,374.



the Osborne-Dartmouth system, the cost to parents was over £560. The training fees at the Colleges amounted to £75 a year plus £25 personal allowance for four years, and Midshipmen required an allowance until reaching lieutenant of at least £160 over three years; if it took longer to reach lieutenant, it would be that much more expensive. In the 1913-14 financial year, parents contributed over £65,575 in training fees, £20,881 in personal expenses and £30,656 in private allowances for a grand total of £117,112 to subsidize the Admiralty training programmes for executive officers.<sup>70</sup>

Boys became naval officers for all sorts of reasons. Many claimed to have been “born to the sea,” including Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, for whom it was a “family heritage.”<sup>71</sup> Dudley de Chair and his brother Ernest determined to become naval officers after reading a novel by W.H.G. Kingston at boarding school.<sup>72</sup> Cyprian Bridge had a father who was too nearsighted to become a naval officer himself; young Cyprian’s career was in some respects the fulfilment of a father’s ambition.<sup>73</sup> Others had older family members in the Navy whom they wished to emulate. Such was the case with Admiral Sir Frederick Fisher, whose older brother, the future Lord Fisher, casually invited him to join.<sup>74</sup> Oswald Frewen joined the navy class at Eton as a way of avoiding “tiresome fagging.”<sup>75</sup> J.H. Godfrey recalled that he had never been consulted about going into the

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<sup>70</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8402/422, Minute by Mr. Ryles, Accounting Branch, Admiralty, 22 May 1914.

<sup>71</sup> Bacon, *Naval Scrap Book*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> De Chair, *The Sea is Strong*, 16.

<sup>73</sup> Cyprian Bridge, *Some Recollections* (London: John Murray, 1918), 17-18.

<sup>74</sup> F.W. Fisher, *Naval Reminiscences* (London: Frederick Muller, 1938), 33-34.

<sup>75</sup> Oswald Frewen, *A Sailor’s Soliloquy* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 33-34.



Navy and that if had been asked he probably would have said no.<sup>76</sup> In the words of the Earl of Dalhousie, himself a flag officer:

They entered the Navy, some because in their simplicity they fancy it offers the nearest escape from lessons and from school; others because their imaginations have been fired by *Peter Simple* and *Midshipman Easy*; but the greater number because their parents are anxious to get their children off their hands – and the Navy offers the earliest and cheapest opportunity of being rid of them.<sup>77</sup>

Even if a young gentleman considered himself unsuited to a naval career, he often was presented with little choice. Bertram Chambers recalled the time when he had to apply himself to the sub-lieutenant's course at Greenwich:

It was now necessary to settle down to a year of hard work if I was to remain a naval officer. The question was, did I want to so remain, and, if not, was there any alternative? I loved and still love the sea. I loved exploration, but I found certain phases of naval life distinctly repugnant to my nature. Still I was at least in an honourable profession and for the first time I was keeping myself. I knew that my parents were having rather a hard time to educate the younger ones, so there was no good increasing their difficulties by asking them to let me try another profession.<sup>78</sup>

The Royal Navy had a clear idea of what it wanted in terms of raw material for the officer corps. "The bookworm, the boy who is constantly day-dreaming and building castles in the air, would be quite out of place in such a practical hard-working service as

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<sup>76</sup> CCAC, J.H. Godfrey Papers (GDFY) 1/1, Memoirs of J.H. Godfrey, 3; see also Patrick Beesley, *Very Special Admiral: The Life of Admiral J.H. Godfrey* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980), 4.

<sup>77</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Lords, *Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., vol. CCLXI (1881), col. 1932. The Earl of Dalhousie was a retired naval officer and had served as the commander of *Britannia*. See also, J.K. Laughton, "Naval Promotion Arithmetically and Historically Considered," *RUSI*, XXIV, No. 106 (1881), 555, comments by Vice Admiral Selwyn; Bowden-Smith, "Entry and Training," 6. Admiral Bowden-Smith contended while ordinary public schools charged no less than £150 per annum while *Britannia* charged only £75.

<sup>78</sup> Bertram Chambers, *Salt Junk: Naval Reminiscences, 1881-1906* (London: Constable, 1927), 125.

the Navy.”<sup>79</sup> Boys who were good at sports and considered of good character were ideal. Since officers were to be gentlemen, those boys who exuded “gentlemanly” qualities were considered first. For instance, in praise of a lower-deck applicant for commissioned rank, Captain Mark Kerr commented to Jellicoe about a young Frederick Boswell who was terribly good at games and boat handling “.... & is a thorough little gentleman in manners & mind.”<sup>80</sup>

The influence of patronage did not end once a cadet entered naval service between the ages of thirteen and fifteen; in fact, it continued until an officer retired or died. Patronage was like a medium of exchange: as an officer advanced in the service he progressively moved from being a net consumer to becoming a net supplier. Patronage played a vital role not only in promotion but also in the selection to favoured postings, which enabled an officer “to seek the fierce light that beats round the flagship...”<sup>81</sup> Upon passing out of *Britannia*, new men found it to their advantage to seek profitable surroundings by serving in close proximity to the stars of the service who were in the best position to assist their careers. Another source of advancement was, as mentioned by one officer, to marry the Admiral’s daughter.<sup>82</sup> Some areas of the service were to be avoided

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<sup>79</sup> P. Hislam, *The Navy: Shown to the Children* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, c.1920), 9.

<sup>80</sup> British Library, Jellicoe Papers, Add. MSS. 49036, Vol. XLVIII, Mark Kerr to Jellicoe, 12 November 1917; see also, CCAC, Chartwell Papers (CHAR) 13/19, Admiral Sir Hedworth Meux to Winston Churchill, 30 May 1913: “I think you will agree that provided that a young officer is devoted to his career the more brilliant he is at games requiring skill & pluck & quickness the better officer he is likely to make.” For an exposition on the games ethic in British education, see J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* (London: Viking, 1985).

<sup>81</sup> CCAC, GDFY 1/1, “The Naval Memoirs of Admiral J.H. Godfrey,” 55.

<sup>82</sup> James, *Sky Was Always Blue*, 82.

if advancement was desired, as Herbert Richmond found when he joined the Hydrographical Branch. He quickly transferred to Torpedo.<sup>83</sup>

Midshipmen were often placed in various fleets according to personal connections. When David Beatty passed out of *Britannia* in 1885, his mother was so aghast that he had been ordered to the China Station that she immediately stormed off to London to persuade Lord Charles Beresford to have her son transferred to the Mediterranean.<sup>84</sup> Beatty was then posted aboard the *Alexandra*, the flagship of the Duke of Edinburgh, which was noted for the high proportion of its junior officers to reach flag rank.<sup>85</sup> This was the golden opportunity for a midshipman to gain the patronage of seniors. Connections made in the gunrooms served not only to gain patronage for advancement but also to cement relationships with future comrades in the senior ranks.

### Education and Training

The officer corps always had an ambivalent attitude toward education and held to the belief that character was more important than scholastic achievement. Indeed, many officers insisted that over-education was undesirable since this would deter a man from being "practical" in the execution of his duties.

On the whole we do not want a high average of intellect in the Navy. The monotonous conditions of a naval life, the long absences from home, the periods during peacetime of comparative idleness, are not in favour of intellectual growth and activity.

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<sup>83</sup> Arthur Marder, (ed.), *The Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Letters of Admiral Sir Hebert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 16.

<sup>84</sup> W.S. Chalmers, *Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Many men of marked talent find a sea life insupportable, and leave it for more congenial work on shore. Without on the other hand accepting the tradition that the "fool of the family," finds his proper place in the Navy, the truth is, that a high range of intellectual power is not, as a rule, desirable. The average class we get make by no means on the whole the worst officers. They are contented with their lot and possessing the usual qualities of English gentlemen, command the respect and obedience of their men. It is by no means certain that men of a much higher average of intellect would possess the same amount of tact and skill in their dealings with their inferiors; the evidence is rather the other way.<sup>86</sup>

Further, Captain Gerard Noel wrote:

No one doubts for a moment that it is desirable that our Service should produce men of highly scientific qualifications in the gunnery, torpedo and surveying branches; but whatever may be their other merits, the most valuable man in time of war will be those who can best command, handle and fight their ships, in fact, the best seamen the aim of all training of the Executive should be to this end.<sup>87</sup>

This was reflected in the tests to which potential cadets were subjected. Fisher indicated that he merely had to jump over a chair, read a passage of Scripture and recount the rule of three.<sup>88</sup> Edmund Fremantle openly admitted that the test was an utter sham and a waste of time.<sup>89</sup> Since a fellow officer had nominated the candidate, a rigorous test was not required. Moreover, since most senior officers knew each personally, everyone was out to confirm their fellow's patronage to protect their own. The examinations for lieutenant

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<sup>86</sup> Hubert H. Grenfell "The Best Method of Providing an Effective Force of Officers and Men for the Navy," *RUSI*, XXVI, No. 115 (1882), 298. See also Ryder, "Higher Education," 796, comments by Admiral Sir George Sartorius.

<sup>87</sup> Gerard Noel, "On the Training of the Executive Branch of the Navy," *RUSI*, XXXIII (1889), 806.

<sup>88</sup> Ruddock McKay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Fremantle, *Navy As I Have Known It*, 4.

were more exacting, but until the mid-nineteenth century they were taken orally before a board of captains. A naval instructor who conducted classes between watches and duties provided what education was available.

The basic problem was that the Admiralty never resolved the dichotomy between training and education.<sup>90</sup> The best way to train a young man to become an officer was to put him in charge of a boat or a station in a ship and make him perform the duty associated with the position. In this way, confidence and leadership qualities, such as quickness of thought and ingenuity, would be fostered. On the other hand, the necessity to handle more complex equipment and the fear of falling behind other professions required officers to have a solid theoretical grounding in mathematics and the physical sciences.

The result was a system that performed neither task very well. As Dr. James Soley wrote in 1880, "the system of training in England has a tendency to grasp the shadow while losing the substance."<sup>91</sup> Midshipmen went to sea with an incomplete general education in part because the Admiralty could never quite resolve whether they were officers or schoolboys. There was a constant tussle between the ship's executive officer and the naval instructor over the division of time between schoolwork and practical duties.<sup>92</sup> Even then, the education afforded them often was not of sterling quality.<sup>93</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> Indeed, this criticism was levelled shortly after the introduction of the *Britannia* system. See, NMM, G. Noel Papers (NOE) 29A; and Pontifex, *Our Future Admirals* (Portsmouth: J. Griffin & Co., 1876), 3.

<sup>91</sup> United States, Congressional Papers, Senate Executive Documents, 46<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, US Serial Set # 1884, Executive Document No. 51, Professor James Russell Soley, "Report on Foreign Systems of Naval Education" (1880), 89.

<sup>92</sup> Bacon, *Naval Scrap Book*, 59; BPP, "Report of the Committee on the Higher Education of Naval Officers," vol. XXV, C. 203 (1870), 985, testimony of Naval Instructor, Rev. Thomas Main. BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into the System of Training Naval Cadets on Board H.M.S. *Britannia*," vol. XV, C. 1154 (1875), 357. The ... presence of naval discipline is in our opinion antagonistic to the work of the schoolmaster."

handling of boats, for example, was more interesting to the young men than being cooped up in class. Moreover, it exposed them to the scrutiny of their seniors, and the opinion of senior executive officers was more important to their future careers than performance on examinations. As long as a midshipman scraped through it did not matter as much as whether his intangible qualities were up to scratch.

Examinations for the rank of lieutenant were held irregularly even though they were supposedly the hallmark of modernity. Each midshipman endeavouring to become a lieutenant had to present himself for an oral examination before a panel of officers. Often these exams were manipulated, and not until late in the century were controls placed on them. Starting in the 1870s all aspiring officers had to pass through the Royal Naval College at Greenwich to take written examinations that were intended to ensure that they possessed at least a minimum of scientific education.

Regardless of the changes that affected other evaluations, the oral seamanship examination continued. Most senior officers deemed it essential that a midshipman obtain a first- or second-class certificate. This rite of passage was more or less a mark of professional competence and a judgement on the acceptability of a young officer. Edmund Fremantle recalled his disappointment that he had only received a second.

I have given the above details, because the seamanship examination was then and still is far too much of a fluke, though it is true it is conducted in much more systematic manner than formerly; but it depends entirely on the examining officers, and their standards are different, while often the 'exigencies of the service,' or possibly the

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<sup>93</sup> Charles Dundas, *An Admiral's Yarn: Stray Memories of Fifty Years* (London: H. Jenkins, 1922), 53. Admiral Dundas recalled the experiences of one Naval Instructor's efforts: "He just let us do as we liked, so we had school in the gunroom. We did about a half an hour's arithmetic, then decided that we had had enough, cut for a cocktail all round and close the shop. It sounds very dreadful now, but amid those surroundings some splendid characters were developed."



private affairs of the examining officers, cause the time at their disposal [to be limited] and the examination is hurried through.<sup>94</sup>

Fremantle was particularly bitter at being deprived of a first and spent several pages in his memoirs denouncing the system. He gave a further example of a vessel (which he declined to name) that was known as a "family ship" where everyone seemed to be related to everyone else and where officers were under considerable pressure to pass favoured candidates.<sup>95</sup>

Unfortunately, one consequence of this system was that many midshipmen were at a considerable disadvantage in taking the lieutenant's exam, even though they had secured the good opinion of their officers. The establishment of sub-lieutenants' courses at Greenwich in 1874 was designed to provide instruction to enable young officers to pass these examinations. While the seamanship examination was performed at sea, the midshipmen undertook a series of exams in pilotage, gunnery, navigation and torpedo work. The preparatory courses were all based on the same type of cramming that had long been the plague of officer education; all the work was directed toward passing the examinations. Nor did it help that young officers were so far removed from the fleet and so close to the temptations of London that discipline proved difficult.<sup>96</sup> For instance, the

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<sup>94</sup> Fremantle, *Navy As I Have Known It*, 98.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 97. The captain of the ship was determined to have a happy commission. When the Admiral's nephew came up for his examination it was found that his knowledge was inadequate and the commander wished to fail him. The Captain refused that verdict and hauled the commander aside "Now L. you promised the admiral when you came to this ship that there should be no rows, and if this young fellow is rejected there must be rows and unpleasantness..."

<sup>96</sup> C.C.P. Fitzgerald, *From Sail to Steam: Naval Recollections, 1878-1905* (London: Edward Arnold, 1916), 132.



diary of Bryan Godfrey-Faussett recounts that he spent nearly every afternoon in London.<sup>97</sup> David Beatty and his friend Walter Cowan spent considerable amounts of time cruising in London hoping to run into someone who would treat them to dinner.<sup>98</sup> As well, the expectation of having a private tutor at Greenwich lured many midshipmen into neglecting their studies while at sea.

There was much criticism of naval education, not least from its victims. Kenneth Dewar (entered 1893) excoriated the learning-by-rote system at *Britannia* and the associated “crammers” that prepared young boys for the entrance examinations. Even though Dewar did not attend a crammer, he could “remember learning Euclid’s theorems off by heart at the age of twelve with very little understanding of their meaning. Like the child who interpreted certain passages in the Lord’s Prayer as ‘Harold be Thy Name’ and ‘Lead us not into Thames Station’...”<sup>99</sup> Cyprian Bridge likewise expressed dissatisfaction with the entire system in a letter to his friend John Knox Laughton:

I quite agree with what you say, as to the deplorable ignorance of our naval youth, in spite of all that has been done for education within the last twenty years. There can be no question that foreigners e.g. Americans, are far better educated. It is even more certain that nevertheless our ships are in infinitely better order than those of any other navy... This is, however, no reason why we should be ignorant. The vice of the present system of education is in the attempt – foredoomed to inevitable failure- to put every one through the same mill. Raise the age of entry, do away with all special schools like the *Britannia*... keep your youngsters at sea as much as possible and when there let them do seaman’s work...<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> CCAC, Bryan Godfrey-Faussett Papers (BGGF) 1/1, Godfrey-Faussett diaries.

<sup>98</sup> Chalmers, *Beatty*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> Dewar, *Navy From Within*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Lambert, (ed.), *The Papers of John Knox Laughton Papers* (London: Navy Records Society, 2002), 27, Bridge to Laughton, 26 July 1880.

For an ambitious officer the benchmark of a successful career was promotion.<sup>101</sup> Promotion meant increased pay, status and a better opportunity to establish a household. Not only was active service pay higher but so too was half pay, which meant that an officer would be more likely to have the leisure to pursue other interests and to participate in social activities. Promotion also meant progressively more prestige and an increased chance of gaining suitable rewards, such as knighthoods, entry into “society” and influence. A career could serve as a springboard into political life, as many officers became MP’s and several became peers. After making it past the twin hurdles of promotion to commander and captain, an officer was practically guaranteed eventual promotion to flag rank, if only on the retired list. Even if an officer never served as a flag officer, he would still retain the title and uniform of a rear admiral.<sup>102</sup> Further, while on the active list there was the opportunity of quasi-political service in the Admiralty. Promotion also meant a chance to become a naval attaché or to secure some other plum appointment. Most such positions, however, were in practice reserved for those with

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<sup>101</sup> Indeed, adequate promotion was regarded as essential to the well-being of the service and the wider community. See, J.K. Laughton, “Naval Promotion,” *RUSI*, XXIV, No. 106 (1881), 535. “The interest which attaches to the subject of naval promotion is by no means merely personal, or even technical; it belongs equally to everyone who has the good of his country at heart; for it directly affects the well-being of that service which has been ... ‘the wall and fence of the Kingdom.’ It is on our Officers as much as on our men that the strength of the Navy depends; and their increased efficiency is of at least as much national importance as an extra inch or two of iron on the side of our ships, or a few additional foot-tons to the striking energy of our shot.”

<sup>102</sup> The Admiralty was very reluctant to impinge on this “right” and refrained from reforming the system by making promotion to flag on the basis on selection rather than seniority despite solid actuarial reasons for doing so. PRO, ADM 116/996, Goschen Committee on Executive Lists, 1902.

significant private means since official pay rarely covered the attendant expenses.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, financial considerations could be of considerable importance since it might be difficult to afford appointments or even promotion because of the financial outlay required.<sup>104</sup> In the case of promotion to commander and captain, an officer could spend enough time on half pay to make it financially embarrassing, especially if he was married.

Unfortunately, the Admiralty was unable to promote everyone since the Navy required more junior officers than senior. An average ironclad, for instance, might need five or six lieutenants, but there was only one commander and one captain. And since it was necessary to employ the best officers in the senior posts for considerable lengths of time, a high proportion of the executive branch would never be promoted beyond lieutenant and would be compelled to retire at the age of forty-five. In the 1890s about forty-five percent of lieutenants reached the rank of commander and perhaps half would be promoted further.<sup>105</sup> Of course, the failure to gain promotion on the active list was of particular importance, for as John Knox Laughton wrote: "To each individual the evil becomes a personal one; and he is unable to take a calm and philosophic view of the inexorable rigour of arithmetic."<sup>106</sup> To induce officers to retire, the Admiralty instituted a system of promotion on the retired list that not only gave retired officers higher pensions

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<sup>103</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7793, Naval Attachés – Memorandum by Captain Charles Ottley, 23 June 1904; and ADM 1/8204, Allowances for Naval Attachés, Captain Aubrey Smith to Rear Admiral Edmond Slade, D.N.I., 15 January 1909.

<sup>104</sup> Henry Norton Sullivan (ed.), *The Life and Letters of the Late Admiral Sir Bartholomew Sullivan* (London: John Murray, 1896), vii. Captain Thomas Sullivan refused a knighthood because he could not afford the associated fees.

<sup>105</sup> ADM 116/881, Goschen Report on Executive Lists, 1902.

<sup>106</sup> J.K. Laughton, "Naval Promotion Arithmetically and Historically Considered," *RUSI*, XXIV, No. 106 (1881), 536-537.

but also assuaged the disappointed with more prestigious titles. If an officer served his sea qualifications, he was generally retired with a step in rank. This also happened to captains who retired before they reached the top of the list: assuming they had served their time in command they would receive promotion to flag rank. In the case of officers who through no fault of their own did not acquire enough command time before they reached the top of the captains' list, the Admiralty could seek Treasury approval for special Orders in Council. For instance, David Beatty and Rosslyn Wemyss, both future First Sea Lords, were saved from forced retirement in this fashion.<sup>107</sup>

The trick was to reach captain. As the fleet increased in size, serving lieutenants had an advantage since their chances for promotion became much higher. Lieutenants with less seniority, however, were among the first on the receiving end of the Geddes axe.<sup>108</sup> It is also important to note that despite the expansion, most officers had limited chances to get promoted. If a man had few social connections, he was compelled to "make interest" by attracting the attention and patronage of influential senior officers.

Further, the glut in the number of officers on the active list aggravated the situation. Unless an officer received timely promotion, he had little chance of becoming an active flag officer. Hence, the Admiralty and senior officers were under pressure to advance able men quickly to captain. This practice was questioned in the press and

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<sup>107</sup> PRO, T 1/11192, Admiralty to Treasury, 17 November 1909, application to promote Captain David Beatty to Rear Admiral; and ADM 1/8028, Sanctioning Promotion of Certain Officers to Flag Rank, 26 June 1908; file concerning the elevation of Wemyss, S Gough-Calthorpe, Ernest Troubridge, Thomas Jerram, Douglas Gamble, Doveton Sturdee and others.

<sup>108</sup> In the years following the Great War, economies in government spending resulted in a drastic draw down of Royal Navy strength. As a result, many officers were forced to leave the Service through no fault of their own.

parliament since it appeared that these young men, in the words of Admiral Fremantle, "jobbed up" in rank prematurely. Questions had been raised about the promotion of Commanders the Hon. F.L. Wood, J.S. Graham, the Hon. J.M. Yorke and the Hon. G. Fitzclarence in 1867. These officers had spent an average of only 4½ years as lieutenants before being selected for promotion. The Admiralty claimed that

[a]ll these officers were promoted by the Admiralty in the usual way, under the regulations of having served the time required by the Queen's Regulations to render a Lieutenant eligible for a Commander's commission, viz., "two complete years as Lieutenant in one or more of H.M. Ships in Commission."<sup>109</sup>

Evidence of favouritism is not difficult to find, since the officer corps tended to be a close-knit community. But this system, which our modern minds would deem to be corrupt, did not render the Navy ineffective in the pursuit of its primary task. On the contrary, the gentlemanly origins of its officers were assets. Representing the cream of British society, the Navy carried a tremendous amount of prestige, not just in home waters but also in the outer marches of empire. This prestige often gave British gentlemanly capitalists a comparative advantage in overseas markets. As one officer put it rather bluntly in 1909:

The exact meaning of the word "prestige" is difficult to define, but whatever way we look at it, there can be no doubt that there is "money in it." ... And the moral influence of our past success has undoubtedly been one of the most potent factors in the creation of a mercantile marine which in steam tonnage as nearly equal to that of the whole of the rest of the world put together.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> BPP, "Navy (Promotions) Return of the Services and Sea Time of Commanders Wood, Graham, Fitzclarence and Yorke," vol. XLIV, No. 108 (1867), 562.

<sup>110</sup> "Our Manacled Fleet," *Blackwood's*, CLXXXV (January 1909), 144.

Further, naval officers had the prestige to resist the entreaties of local merchants and consuls and to avoid taking potentially embarrassing actions. An officer serving on the periphery had to balance local interests with the reputation of the Royal Navy and the requirements of Whitehall. Charles Fitzgerald recalled a consul in Beirut who was "... a very grand man, who somehow had got it into his head that I was under his orders, and that he could order me about whenever he thought proper a strange delusion, concerning which I had to undeceive him."<sup>111</sup>

As for promotion, the system was problematic since the size of the active list was strictly limited by Order in Council, and no officer could be promoted onto that list without a special order being obtained with the concurrence of the Treasury. Promotions were sometimes granted for meritorious service under fire, as in the case of those after the intervention in Egypt in 1882.<sup>112</sup> Hence, before the expansion of the fleet at the end of the century promotion was slow. Admiral Fitzgerald recalled one incident in the 1890s where a fire in a ship was bad enough for the captain to order the magazines flooded. "Though, as there were two Rear Admirals and three Post Captains on board, we should have made some welcome vacancies."<sup>113</sup> The flow of promotions was a constant concern as the

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<sup>111</sup> Fitzgerald, *From Sail to Steam*, 19-20. See also University of California, Irvine, Arthur J. Marder Papers, MS -F2, box 25, folder 2, Admiral of the Fleet the Marquess of Milford Haven to Cecil Fisher, 25 August 1921. While Commander in Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, Fisher warned his subordinate flag officer to steer clear of being seen to be at the beck and call of consuls. "The Consul of every Maritime country loves having at least one [of] his nation's ships in port. He gets a salute and then when he meets his colleagues at the club he boasts of all the important 'orders' he is about to give 'his ship'." My thanks to Professor David Facey-Crowther for this reference.

<sup>112</sup> PRO, Treasury Papers (T) 1/14075, Treasury Correspondence regarding special promotions, 1882. Promotion in this fashion, however, was no guarantee of the particular competence of the officer involved. See, G.A. Ballard, "Admiral Ballard's Memoirs: Part Four," *Mariner's Mirror*, LXII, No. 3 (1976), 251.

<sup>113</sup> Fitzgerald, *From Sail to Steam*, 126

Admiralty struggled to find a balance between the needs of the service and the interests of officers while minimizing the cost to the Treasury.<sup>114</sup>

Regardless, most officers would have to wait their turn with the understanding that they might finish their careers as lieutenants. The reason is not hard to see, since in the third quarter of the nineteenth century there were just over 1000 lieutenants and at most sixty active flag officers. By the end of the century, with the massive expansion of the Navy, the rate of promotion temporarily reached the unprecedented level of two-thirds of lieutenants reaching the rank of commander.<sup>115</sup> Commanders faced a second test after they attained five or six years of seniority and entered the zone for promotion to captain. Although patronage could gain promotion or a choice appointment, an officer still had to have the respect of his superiors and demonstrate his competence. While a flag lieutenant's billet was a ticket for promotion to commander, it was a challenging job to manage the social, diplomatic and professional affairs of his admiral. Hence, admirals had good reason to ensure that the individual selected would be to his credit.

One of the ways to advance a favoured officer was by "haul-down promotions" which permitted an admiral who was relinquishing his appointment to promote his flag lieutenant. This was a convenient way of promoting nephews and sons of friends. A list of officers receiving such preferment reads like a *Who's Who* of the late Victorian Navy. Such men included Algernon Lyons, Frederick Richards, Michael Culme-Seymour,

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<sup>114</sup> PRO, ADM 116/881, File on the Management of Executive Lists, 1889-1913. This file contains information pertaining to the Admiralty's efforts for over a quarter of a century to manage the officer recruitment problem. See Chapter IV for a more expansive discussion. See also, Donald Chisholm, *Waiting for Dead Men's Shoes: The Development of the U.S. Navy's Officer Personnel System, 1793-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 29-32.

<sup>115</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8370/65, Memorandum on Executive Lists by Charles Walker, 1912, 20.



Edmund Fremantle, John Hopkins, Edward Seymour, William Kennedy, Robert Harris and Lord Charles Beresford, all of whom reached active flag rank.<sup>116</sup> Several officers argued that although this could advance them faster than their fellows, such advancement was a double-edged sword because an officer promoted in this way had to demonstrate that he was worthy.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, Philip Colomb defended patronage. During a lecture presentation by Rear Admiral A.P. Ryder at the Royal United Services Institution in 1871, "If I had my choice, I should extend the patronage very much more to Naval Officers, for the reasons stated by the lecturer, that is, that naval Officers as a rule will take the precaution to see that their protégés are such as would likely to do them credit."<sup>118</sup>

Another special promotion was available to those who served in the Royal Yacht Squadron. For instance, Lord Charles Scott, Harry Rawson, Day Bosanquet, Archibald Berkeley Milne, Prince Louis of Battenberg, Stanley Colville, Colin Keppel, Christopher Cradock, Rosslyn Wemyss, Gerard Noel, William May, Richard Poore and George Warrender all received such promotions.<sup>119</sup> Close ties to Court and the possession of private means were mandatory. Senior captains, especially those considered "deserving,"

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<sup>116</sup> James Bramble, *Promotion and Retirement of Flag Officers and Captains of the Royal Navy, 1899* (Portsmouth: Holbrook & Son, 1899), 25.

<sup>117</sup> Fremantle, *Navy As I Have Known It*, 459.

<sup>118</sup> Ryder, "Higher Education," 793-794.

<sup>119</sup> Bramble, *Promotion*, 26. All these officers had prominent careers on the flag list, including two who became First Sea Lord, Battenberg and Wemyss.

were awarded a G.S.P. or offered the post of a naval A.D.C. to the sovereign. Officers so selected were those likely to be employed on the active flag list.<sup>120</sup>

Officers who appeared to have exceeded their competence were either relegated to half pay or appointed to positions that made it clear that their chances of further promotion were slim. In his autobiography Admiral James referred to many commanders who were not up to the requirements of the position and ended their careers at that rank. It is also likely that such officers would not serve the sea time required to receive a step in rank on reaching retirement age.

While patronage was an enormous asset in advancing the careers of officers, it did not mask incompetence. Promotion was underwritten by patronage since no one could gain advancement without the support of his captain and observations of the performance of his duties. As one officer quipped, "... an Officer with friends & ability will go a long way, with friends and no ability will also go a long way but with ability and no friends he won't get a look in."<sup>121</sup>

Promotion and advancement was by merit, but some men gained it more easily than others. This tended to cement norms that could be viewed as contrary to the spirit of liberal democracy. The view from outside was that in the Navy a privileged elite could promote the interests of their sons and friends at public expense. The reality, however,

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<sup>120</sup> PRO, ADM 116/4500, ADC's and GSP's Appointments and Awards to Officers, 1912-1942. Generally selected captains were given the choice between receiving a G.S.P. or an A.D.C. Those with little or no private means usually selected the G.S.P. since it entitled them to several hundred pounds additional to their regular rate of pay. Receiving an A.D.C. was generally a money loser as social obligations were not only more frequent but also expensive.

<sup>121</sup> NMM, A.E.M. Chatfield Papers (CHT), 8/1, Lieutenant Commander Albert E. Way to Chatfield, 29 December 1942. Way was an embittered officer who, from his rank on the retired list, had never been selected for promotion and finished out his career as a lieutenant commander.

was not so clear-cut. For instance, of the cadets entered in 1886, only seven of fifty-seven were the sons of naval officers, and each candidate had to compete in a rigorous series of examinations supervised by the Civil Service Commission.<sup>122</sup> Many officers without connections prior to entering the service were able to attach themselves to rising stars like Fisher. Their skills and energy in performing their duties as junior officers substituted for influence, and there were many senior officers who valued this ability far more than an able man's antecedents or the connections.<sup>123</sup>

Patronage could also cause problems, since preferment for one man necessarily excluded others. "But though this patronage is large, it is sometimes only five barley loaves and two small fishes to the hungry multitude; and the happy one selected leaves a crowd of discontented aspirants behind him."<sup>124</sup> This was particularly a concern for the Naval Assistant to the First Lord (usually a junior rear admiral) who had the prickly task of overseeing promotions and appointments. As the social position of the Navy increased towards the end of the century, along with closer connections to the monarchy and increased public interest, it became more difficult to demonstrate that promotion was based solely on merit. Nor did it help that there were officers like Fisher who, while associating with the elite, derided much of the officer corps as "aristocratic holdovers."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> PRO, ADM 1/6837, Correspondence with Civil Service Commission, 1886.

<sup>123</sup> Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I, 84.

<sup>124</sup> Colomb, *Memoirs*, 414.

<sup>125</sup> Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 314, Fisher to ?, 3 May 1904, "Now remember an Admiral is about *the* most self-satisfied type of being on the earth! 'Such and such a thing did not exist when he came to sea; then why the devil should it exist now?' 'The Service has been going to the dogs' ever since he's known it... 'He'll d—d if he will be any party to these new-fangled notions!' 'Fight tooth and nail against it!'"

Officers were also constantly under observation by their superiors, and the successful execution of duties or lapses in judgement could make or break an officer easily. As Admiral James wrote:

A naval Captain, seeing a brother Captain pass by on his way to his trial by court-martial on a charge of running his ship on to a sandbank, remarked, 'There go I but for the grace of God.' During my fifty years in the Navy I saw ample evidence of the truth of that remark And so I feel that every officer who hoists his Admiral's flag should be humble and remember his contemporaries, of professional ability and powers of command at least equal to his own, who, but for a human error or being saddled with the responsibility for other men's mistakes, might have been hoisting their flags instead of himself.<sup>126</sup>

Another officer remarked that he had by chance run to the bridge to find his officer of the watch about to put the ship on the rocks.<sup>127</sup>

### **Courts Martial and Judicial Power**

Reforms, however, did not significantly affect one aspect of the power of executive officers: they remained in effect judge, jury and executioner under the Naval Discipline Acts. Only executive officers could sit on courts martial and only they could inflict summary punishments. Although the authority of captains to flog was essentially eliminated in the 1870s, other punishments remained available. Naval courts martial had

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<sup>126</sup> James, *Sky Was Always Blue*, vii.

<sup>127</sup> Lewis Bayly, *Pull Together! The Memoirs of Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly* (London: George G. Harrap, 1939), 114.

the authority to award punishments up to and including the death penalty and to impose prison sentences subject only to appeal to the Board of Admiralty.<sup>128</sup>

The executive branch not only had this power over ratings but also over every other branch, including engineering. Furthermore, in courts martial the authority of the executive was rigidly maintained, even in situations where a panel considered that a commissioned officer was largely at fault, while ratings who challenged the authority of officers were rigorously prosecuted. For example, in the case of 1906 Portsmouth Barracks riots, Lieutenant Bernard Collard received a reprimand while the stokers involved were given prison terms.<sup>129</sup>

Officers convicted of an offence were treated much differently than were ratings. The former rarely received prison sentences; in general, the harshest punishment was dismissal with disgrace.<sup>130</sup> Even in the event of negligence or improper conduct resulting in death, sentences were mild.<sup>131</sup> In the words of Jack Fisher, "[a] Court Martial is all right when the exasperated able seaman knocks Lieutenant Buggins into the 'lee scuppers'! but read the Court Martial on the *Theseus* grounding... as a specimen of mild

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<sup>128</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 349. Death penalties were rarely imposed even during wartime, whereas the Army executed over 300 soldiers during the First World War. Although my research has failed to uncover the execution of any naval personnel by the Admiralty during that conflict, it is likely that members of the naval service subject to the War Office's authority (members of the Royal Naval Division) did receive death sentences.

<sup>129</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7895, Portsmouth Incident Court Martial, 1906.

<sup>130</sup> PRO, ADM 7/929, Confidential Commanders' Book; case of Commander Frederick Maxwell-Heron who was dismissed from the service for fourteen counts of misappropriation of stores where a rating or a warrant officer would have received a prison sentence.

<sup>131</sup> Charles Dundas, *An Admiral's Yarn: Stray Memories of 50 Years* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1922), 29, recounted that a group of officers, tired of the food prepared by the wardroom's Chinese cook, convened a fake "court martial" in which the unfortunate man was sentenced to "death." Although the group meant only to give the man a dunking, he accidentally drowned. The ringleader was dismissed from the Service with disgrace and imprisoned for twelve months while the other participants were severely reprimanded.

incapacity to serve out justice!”<sup>132</sup> This imbalance was justified on the grounds of social position:

An officer sent to prison loses in social degradation far more than the man, he is put to unaccustomed manual labour with people of an entirely different class and is deprived of any intellectual pleasures or recreations which he may have been in the habit of enjoying, besides suffering that which is common to both, the deprivation of liberty and the loss of the mere bodily pleasures, and in addition it is far more difficult for a man in the officer's position to make a fresh start in life than for a man who works with his hands.<sup>133</sup>

Furthermore, in cases where it appeared likely that an officer would be convicted of a serious offence, he might be given the option to retire under the provisions of the Misconduct Order-in-Council that enabled him to maintain a modest pension.<sup>134</sup> Officers of more senior rank might be quietly invited to retire “at their own request,” often with a step up in rank to avoid embarrassment.<sup>135</sup> During this period, courts martial were public and widely reported in daily newspapers.<sup>136</sup>

The Admiralty could also run interference for officers involved in minor disagreements. For instance, the Admiralty refused to supply the addresses of officers to

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<sup>132</sup> Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 256, Fisher to Selborne, 24 July 1902.

<sup>133</sup> PRO, ADM 178/11, “Equalisation of Sentences Panel, 1914,” memorandum by Masterman-Smith, July 1914.

<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, officers showed little restraint in the prosecution of crimes committed by ratings unless there was an allegation of “unnatural” offences. PRO, ADM 156/9, Case of Sodomy aboard H.M.S. *Gloucester*, 1913; significantly, this file remained sealed until 1997.

<sup>135</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8569/276, Order in Council re. Misconduct, 1901; “An Officer, who, in the opinion of the Admiralty, by reason of an act or acts of misconduct, or through intemperate or irregular habits of life has become unfit for, or in the, opinion of the Admiralty, is for any reason unworthy of, further employment, may be placed on the Retired or Pensioned List irrespective of Age or Service, whether he has been tried by Court Martial or not.”

<sup>136</sup> “Court Martial,” *The Times*, 7 April 1910. Not only was the complete exposition of the court martial of Lieutenant F. Hastings Thomas, R.M.L.I. recorded but so too was a letter he wrote to a close friend while on the run from the law.



tradesmen seeking payment of outstanding accounts. Even so, to avoid such disputes many officers had mail forwarded to their clubs.<sup>137</sup> Influence could be used to get an officer out of a scrape by shipping him overseas. Indeed, Fisher recalled that as Second Naval Lord he had shipped out a lieutenant inside twelve hours at the request of a prominent parent.<sup>138</sup>

Courts martial also investigated incidents where a vessel was damaged or lost. Sentences generally were rather mild, with the worst being a severe reprimand. A career could survive a conviction as long as the event in question was not too embarrassing and the officer received a caution or a simple (rather than a severe) reprimand. There were also a significant number of administrative penalties open to the Admiralty, including the ability to assign an officer to a post that indicated that his chances for further promotion were slight. There were there other hazards. One of these was drink.<sup>139</sup> Drunkenness was a court martial offence and was punished with severe reprimands and even dismissal from a ship.<sup>140</sup> A career could generally survive one such incident, but a second or third conviction generally resulted in dismissal from the service.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8363, Treasury Correspondence, file on debt, 1913. The Admiralty refused to supply the name of a dead Petty Officer to a tradesman to collect on a debt from his estate.

<sup>138</sup> Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 312, Fisher to Arthur Loring, 26 April 1904.

<sup>139</sup> Bacon, *Naval Scrap Book*, 40-41. However, there were cases of individuals who chronically abused alcohol and were compelled to retire. PRO, ADM 7/930, Summary of Commander's Records, 142, case of Commander F.G. de Lisle, "Indifferent conduct... *not temperate* – From all I can gather this officer has *done* nothing in his ship & has passed his time drinking in his cabin." See also, J.K. Laughton, "Naval Education," *RUSI*, XXVI, No. 115 (1882), 350. "No account can be taken of the number of failures: but of those through ignorance, drink, and immorality went wholly to the dogs, the number was extremely large: and many of those who did not thus utterly break down, there were a very great many who dragged on in the Service, as ignorant of sea as of everything else that was reputable."

<sup>140</sup> An example of this is to be found in *The Times*, 5 January 1900, where Lieutenant M.E.L. Thompson was convicted of drunkenness and sentenced to the loss of six months' seniority and dismissed from his



## Political Power

Finally, the executive branch was largely permitted to regulate the entire naval establishment through its effective domination of the Board of Admiralty. Although the First Lord was a government minister, he was not a Secretary of State like the political heads of the Foreign and War Offices.<sup>142</sup> Though he was the only member of the Board directly responsible to Parliament and had unquestioned constitutional authority, the First Lord's power was constrained because in practice he had to possess the confidence of its naval members. Resignation, or even its threat, by the naval members could in the right circumstances make the First Lord's position untenable and even bring down governments. For instance, the rupture between Fisher and Churchill in May 1915 threatened the stability of the Asquith government.<sup>143</sup> Hence, the professional heads of the service possessed a considerable amount of political power, although it had to be exercised sparingly.<sup>144</sup> In the words of Vice-Admiral P.H. Colomb, "[t]he sole power in his hands is resignation; and he must gravely consider whether there will be loss or gain

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ship. Charges for drunkenness reached epidemic proportions during the war when over one thousand courts martial were conducted against officers; see PRO, ADM 1/85565/110, Memorandum by R.B.D. Acland, Judge Advocate of the Fleet, April 1919.

<sup>141</sup> PRO, ADM 178/11, Naval Courts Martial –Equalisation of Sentences Panel, May 1914, minute by Mr. Masterman-Smith. See also ADM 1/9509, Charges of Drunkenness Against Officers, 1891-1892.

<sup>142</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. LV (1898), col. 341. See also, Fitzgerald, *Sail to Steam*, 165 for an interesting viewpoint on the complex relationship between the First Lord and his naval colleagues; and Michael Culme-Seymour, "The Admiralty and the War Office," *Nineteenth Century*, LIV, October 1903), 558-560.

<sup>143</sup> Paul Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (London: University College London Press, 1994), 117. Fisher and Churchill, then First Lord, came to blows over the Dardanelles fiasco.

<sup>144</sup> Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, 38-48, and Rodger, *Admiralty*.

to the service and the public by his exercise of it.”<sup>145</sup> This political power not only enhanced the influence of senior officers but also reinforced the importance of the entire corps.

Officers also enjoyed a tradition of independent command in which flag officers and captains possessed considerable latitude. Although First Naval Lords and the Admiralty as a whole were directly responsible to Parliament, their authority on the periphery was necessarily limited. As A.J.L. Blond has argued:

[n]aval officers often pursued individual interests, ideas and theories. The wide discretion and personal responsibility of officers on foreign stations followed from the lack of any means of direct supervision from the Admiralty. Yet even on home stations independently minded officers had considerable autonomy within broad Admiralty parameters. The Victorian Navy was full of colourful characters who did not fit into conventional society or conform to typical images of establishment figures. Service life, far from requiring conformity, often bred great individualists and eccentricity.<sup>146</sup>

## Conclusion

Even before the Fisher reforms, mechanisms were in place to try to ensure the professional competence of the executive officer corps. In the nineteenth century the Royal Navy was expected to do more than fight wars against other Great Powers or put down colonial revolts. The Navy was to provide a presence to further British commerce; to exercise imperial influence; and to represent what was the best of the British social

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<sup>145</sup> P.H. Colomb, *The Memoirs of Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key* (London: Methuen, 1898), 411.

<sup>146</sup> A.J.L. Blond, “Technology and Tradition: Wireless Telegraphy and the Royal Navy, 1895-1920” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Lancaster, 1993), 137-138.

elite. The task of every British naval officer was to be a gentleman, since it was imperative that he be able to deal with foreign officers as social equals. Further, with the confidence of social position came independence of judgment that permitted an officer to evaluate a situation and not be pushed into ill-considered action by consuls or commercial interests. Hence, tight social and political connections between the state and the officers served to further the interests of both Whitehall and the City.

The other restraint that factored into every decision made by successive British governments was financial. While the aristocracy, gentry and professionals produced more sons than they could place, the state was able to offer honourable positions at comparatively little cost to itself. Social prestige, the right to wear a uniform and a chance to achieve prominence was held out to parents who, in effect, subsidized the training and upkeep of young officers. This system worked well in the context of limited government while the Navy extracted smaller amounts of resources from the community.

Yet, as will become apparent, this satisfactory relationship broke down when the Navy made increasing demands on the British Treasury at the same time that the Reform Bill of 1884 and the relative decline of landed income eroded the foundations of aristocratic government. Social reform, coupled with increasing naval expansion, required the officer corps to transform itself if it wanted to retain its powerful influence over naval policy. Moreover, changes associated with the second industrial revolution increased the specialized skills required to construct, manage and operate modern warships. These circumstances threatened to turn the executive officer corps into just one professional group among many within the naval establishment. And even worse, it raised the spectre of the existing corps having a comparatively weak claim on the state's resources.

## Chapter IV

### *Secundis Dubiisque Rectus* - Threats to Professional Status<sup>1</sup>

But we are naturally a conservative service. We do not like change... but the whole condition of service at sea is changing; the nature of the weapons we have to fight with is changing; the ship herself is changed; and unless the Officers change with these, they will find themselves in the background... If we do not keep pace with the times, we shall lose the high position of naval Officers, capable of advising the Government in the management and control of naval affairs. We want men of smart intellects, of good education, and knowledge of affairs, which can only be got by opening up to naval men spheres of responsibility outside mere professional routine...<sup>2</sup>

#### Introduction

At the end of the Victorian era, the executive officer corps entered a period of profound change. This change went beyond mere advances in technology, complexity of warship design or even the advent of the new imperialism. Instead, the essential contract that bound the officer to the state was revised in such a way that it became distinctly uncomfortable to many officers and to the families that supplied the corps with its recruits. As Jan Glete has postulated, the state bureaucracy was to be at the heart of the double contractual relationship that bound it to the general population and the military establishment.<sup>3</sup> In this way the state became a legitimized “protection racket” as it “sold” security to the populace while simultaneously restraining and regulating the military. The

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<sup>1</sup>E.C. Talbot-Booth, *The Royal Navy - Some Account of Her Manners, Customs and Privileges* (London: Sampson, Low & Co., 1942), 499, motto of H.M.S. *Duncan*, “Upright in Prosperity and Peril.”

<sup>2</sup>J.K. Laughton, “Naval Promotion Arithmetically and Historically Considered,” *The Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XXIV, No. 106 (1881), 558, comments by Commander W. Dawson.

<sup>3</sup>Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States, 1500-1650* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5-8.

dynamic described by Glete, however, did not end once the modern ship of state left the metaphorical dockyard, since as this vessel encountered storms it was refitted, modernized and sometimes completely rebuilt. When social, economic and cultural changes occurred, this double contractual relationship was constantly subject to renegotiation and revision as the needs of each party altered.

In the case of the Royal Navy, this relationship was undergoing drastic change. The sources of recruits, military and naval families, the landed gentry and the professional classes, were no longer providing the numbers of officers required to man the growing battle fleet according to the old provisions. As a result, the Admiralty was forced to find alternative sources and to raise the prestige of non-combatant officers while still attempting to restrain growing naval estimates that were under intense scrutiny by Parliament and the public. Further, changes in naval affairs and the international situation limited the non-monetary compensation that officers received in exchange for service.

The heart of the issue was simple arithmetic. As was mentioned in one study of the European officer corps, the old elite maintained effective control over the armed forces until their numbers were exhausted.<sup>4</sup> In the Royal Navy, this occurred in the aftermath of the Naval Defence Act of 1889 that expanded the fleet and committed Britain to the maintenance of the two-power standard. Increased vessel strength required more officers. At the same time, families were expected to make an even higher financial

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<sup>4</sup> George A. Kourvetaris and Betty A. Dobratz, *Social Origins and Political Orientations of Officers Corps in a World Perspective* (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1973), 4. See also V.H.G. Bernard, "The Supply and Training of Officers for the Royal Navy," *RUSI*, LXIX (1924), 65, comments by Vice Admiral Sir William Goodenough. "If we cannot get the requisite numbers of candidates for the Navy from the class we wish to get it from, we shall have to go to other places..."

investment after the turn of the century to place sons in the service.<sup>5</sup> The opportunity costs of a naval career no longer seemed to many to be worth the investment.

As a result of the Admiralty's failure to recruit a sufficient number of "suitable" officers, alternative sources of officer recruitment were required. The most logical supply involved the direct entry of public school boys. This caused resentment because some people saw these boys as interlopers who threatened the prospects of those entering in the traditional way through the Royal Naval Colleges.<sup>6</sup> Concern over this source was minor, however, in comparison to complaints about an alternative. The lower deck provided a reservoir of experienced warrant and petty officers fit to stand watch (as indeed some already were).<sup>7</sup> Considerable pressure had been placed on the Admiralty to expand the opportunity for warrant and petty officers to advance onto the quarterdeck. Although suitable individuals sometimes did advance, and while lieutenancies were bestowed as retirement gifts to long-serving warrant officers, the Admiralty resisted offering a regular form of promotion off the lower deck.<sup>8</sup> Even when it did offer it with the Mate Scheme of 1913, it was structured in such a way that the possibility of high command was nil.

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<sup>5</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 1/8402/422, Memorandum by Account General, 22 May 1914.

<sup>6</sup> "The Public Schools and the Navy," *The Times*, 10 January 1914.

<sup>7</sup> Henry T. Capper, *Aft From the Hawsehole: Sixty-Two Years of Sailors' Evolution* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927), 94. Capper relates performing the duties of a commissioned officer while being firmly put in his place as a warrant officer by Captain Lewis Beaumont. See also, John Wells, *The Royal Navy: An Illustrated Social History, 1870-1982* (Stroud: Sutton, 1994), 35.

<sup>8</sup> "Naval Efficiency," *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal*, XV (May 1902), 51. "A ranker in the navy may be qualified to occupy with distinction, commissioned rank in the fleet; but the bogey of a past century, call it what you will, musty old regulations or prejudice, steps in and says, No! a ranker! the idea! And the unfortunate, though perchance, brilliant ranker, having reached the rank of Warrant Officer at a comparatively early age, finds his pathway barred to any further promotion and wallows in the 'Slough of Despond' until he is 55 when he retires a soured and disappointed man, practically a Warrant Officer still after serving all his life under the flag."



However, the precedent had been established, and this brought into question the status of the officer corps as an exclusive elite. In this way, such schemes constituted an eccentric attack on the executive officer corps.<sup>9</sup>

Other forms of long-available psychic and social benefits that to modern eyes seem silly and even reactionary were called into question. Naval officers resisted granting military titles to non-combatants and the adoption of the executive "curl" to engineers.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, they aspired to maintain the exclusivity of the wardroom mess. These positions were not regarded as foolish at the time because these officers had been dedicated to the service of the Navy since they were thirteen, and their parents had made a bargain with the state to provide their sons for service in exchange for certain benefits to be accrued in the future. The Admiralty seemed to be reneging on that bargain while doing virtually nothing to relieve the financial burdens on naval officers. As the Navy concentrated in fleets and in home waters there were fewer opportunities for travel and adventure. There was also less of a chance that an officer would distinguish himself in battle on the periphery. The combination of fewer watch-standing officers and the increased tempo of operations meant less time for leisure, less time on half pay and more time on duty.<sup>11</sup> The increased "scientific" tone of naval training meant more time for classroom instruction

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<sup>9</sup> W. Hunt Grubbe, "Should Commissions be Given by the Queen to Naval Warrant Officers?" *United Service Magazine*, II (1891), 479. "I think the experiment, if tried, would be unsatisfactory; it would certainly tend to keep parents from sending their sons into the Navy; it would, in time, republicanise the Navy, a most undesirable thing to do."

<sup>10</sup> The executive curl was a piece of looped gold braid worn on the last ring of the sleeves of officers' jackets. It signified that the wearer was of the command line rather than merely a civil branch officer. See PRO, ADM 116/1708, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Hedworth Meux to Admiralty, 6 December 1913: "It hardly required an acquaintance with Æsop to realise the folly of masquerading in other people's attire."

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this became further justification for the advancement of lower deck men to commissioned rank. See "A Naval Need," *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal*, XV (May 1902), 59.



when not at sea. In short, naval life, already arduous and uncomfortable, was becoming even less attractive.

Other conditions forced the corps and the Admiralty to rework the essence of the contractual relationship. Although pay was a problem for the executive branch, other intangible social and psychic rewards seemed under concerted attack. Having a vested interest in prestige and the non-monetary aspects of the service, executive officers understandably reacted strongly to attempts to water down these benefits. This did not make them reactionaries, merely defenders of vested interest. Nor were they snobs, in the Edwardian sense, since they were defending what they were, not aspiring to something they were not.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the fact that the Victorian era was the heyday of privilege and patronage, and notwithstanding the considerable social prestige accorded the executive officer corps, unresolved issues remained that served to constrain the professional space of officers. As the century progressed, these inconsistencies between the corps and wider British society became increasingly stark. One of these challenges was the growth in the importance of engineers. Although naval officers approved of engineering as an occupation, they were more ambivalent about the engineering profession. In particular, they were alarmed about attempts to seize control over important aspects of the naval establishment and reluctant

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<sup>12</sup> See C.C.P. Fitzgerald, "The Admiralty Scheme: The New Regulations for the Entry and Training of Naval Officers," *United Service Magazine*, XXVI (March 1903), 588; and Churchill College, Cambridge Archives Centre (CCAC), H.P.A. Hankey Papers (HINKY) 5/3, Hankey to Arthur Marder, 4 December 1959.

to countenance the extension of executive command to engineering officers. This issue was so vital to the officer corps that it has been assigned its own chapter.<sup>13</sup>

However, other issues challenged the corps in this period with increasing frequency and forced adjustments in its professional culture. Firstly, the executive branch had to come to terms with the loss of its apparent economic independence, which in any case was a polite fiction by the late nineteenth century. Yet as professionalism became redefined it became imperative to improve the conditions for officers in order to get the right sort in Her Majesty's uniform while officers became increasingly dependent on their pay. Although serving officers largely controlled the Admiralty, increased pay or benefits were subject to Treasury and Cabinet approval.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, naval officers experienced the gradual erosion of their authority, not only on foreign stations but also within individual ships. From the 1850s, the press and Parliament carefully scrutinized conditions of the lower deck. The ability of officers to exercise personal initiative was also being constrained by changes in technology, command and deployment patterns. Many viewed this narrowing with alarm, and this fuelled much of the opposition to Jack Fisher after he became First Sea Lord in 1904.

Thirdly, naval officers were confronted with the challenge to promote warrant officers and ratings into the wardroom. Yet even when this became reality, specific obstacles still existed that prevented ex-ratings from achieving high rank. Indeed, even receiving a step in rank to commander was extremely unlikely. Rear Admiral Thomas

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter V.

<sup>14</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8318, Treasury Communication regarding a combined Army and Navy Journal, 1911. The Admiralty and Treasury wrangled over £50 in the projected compensation for a naval editor for the journal.

Lyne, who made flag rank in the late 1920s, was the first man in nearly a century to make the leap to Rear Admiral.<sup>15</sup> Promoting such men was regarded as a method to deal with the problem of lower deck ambition.

The fourth major difficulty was the critical shortage of junior commissioned officers. The problem was two-fold: first, the system of training officers was expensive and took nearly nine years (after the advent of the Selborne Scheme in 1902)<sup>16</sup> from the time a boy became a cadet until he was commissioned as a lieutenant; and second, if too many officers were recruited, a higher proportion could not be promoted, would retire as senior lieutenants and would thus distort the flow of promotion.<sup>17</sup> The shortage of officers was a direct consequence of the expansion triggered by the Naval Defence Act of 1889. The Admiralty attempted various schemes to fix this problem and before the outbreak of war was forced to resort to several expedients to find enough junior officers.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, public interest combined with the higher estimates to compel the Navy to justify its policies as it had never done before. With the advent of the popular press, the increasing size of the British electorate and the dramatic growth in the naval establishment, the opinions of the so-called "chattering classes" could not be ignored.

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<sup>15</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8687/179, Promotion to Flag Rank of Capt Thomas Lyne, 1931. Indeed, regulations had to circumvented to achieve this, as a Commissions and Warrant Branch clerk minuted: "To advance him out of his turn would be contrary to the traditions of the service which have been jealously guarded for the best part of two centuries."

<sup>16</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, "Memorandum Dealing with the Entry, Training and Employment of Officers and Men of the Royal Navy and of the Royal Marines," vol. LXI, Cd. 1385 (1903), 677.

<sup>17</sup> PRO, ADM 116/881, Hoskins Report on Naval Lists, 1897, xiii.

<sup>18</sup> PRO, ADM 116/881, Findlaison Actuarial Report, 1892.

## Centralization of Power

Other threats to professional space were also important. The advent of new technologies and centralized command arrangements reined in the independence and initiative of naval officers on distant stations and even in home waters. The Admiralty possessed increasing access to levers of control through the telegraph and, after the turn of the century, the wireless.<sup>19</sup> Access to such means of communication gave central authorities in London greater effective control over activities at sea.<sup>20</sup> Closely related to the extension of control from the centre, a similar situation was occurring in the various squadrons and fleets. Greater tactical control was at the fingertips of senior admirals as steam replaced sail and other forms of signalling were brought to the fore. Admirals could co-ordinate their fleets in mathematically calculated manoeuvres that permitted little initiative to subordinate flag officers and captains. Andrew Gordon has examined this change when he connected the loss of H.M.S. *Victoria* and the consequent death of Vice Admiral Sir George Tyron in 1893 with the disappointing results of the Battle of Jutland in 1916.<sup>21</sup> Tyron ordered a manoeuvre that resulted in a disastrous collision. As the Royal Navy became more and more oriented toward fighting a possible Great Power conflict rather than continuing as an imperial police force, ships and officers were increasingly sent to organized, homogeneous squadrons. Junior officers had even less scope for initiative and fewer

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<sup>19</sup> PRO, ADM 116/3018, "Wireless Telegraphy in War", 4 August 1908. In the case of the Army, see Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Victorians at War* (London: Hambledon & London, 2003), 5-7.

<sup>20</sup> Cyprian Bridge, "The Re-Distribution of the Fleet," *Cornhill Magazine*, XVIII (1905), 602.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996), 567-569.

chances for overseas appointments. The ultimate symbol of this concentration of control was the advent of the Naval War Staff under Winston Churchill in 1912.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout this period, the Admiralty was able to assert an increasing level of administrative control over the officer corps. It had worked throughout the nineteenth century to limit the patronage available to senior officers and had laid down specific regulations for the education and training of officers.<sup>23</sup> Although patronage continued to be a factor, promotion was under increasing scrutiny from a political culture that became aware of concepts of professionalism and promotion by merit. The other end of an officer's career was also becoming tightly controlled out of financial and operational necessity. An Order in Council of 1870 prescribed universal rules for the retirement of all officers regardless of seniority, and the Admiralty became the agency of these retirements from the active list.<sup>24</sup> Admiralty control over careers reached its apogee under Fisher and Churchill. As the major fleets became concentrated in home waters after 1910, this control was further heightened.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *BPP*, "Appendix to the Statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty Explanatory of the Navy Estimates, 1912-1913," vol. LII, Cd. 6106 (1912-1913), 306.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Dandeker, "Patronage and Bureaucratic Control: The Case of the Naval Officer in English Society," *British Journal of Sociology*, XXIX (1978), 300-301.

<sup>24</sup> *BPP*, "Navy (Officers) Order in Council on Retirement," vol. XLIV, No. 247 (1870), 715.

<sup>25</sup> See PRO, ADM 116/881, File on the Control of Executive Lists, 1894-1913. This file contains the results of several attempts by the Admiralty to control the flow of promotion and career paths of executive officers. Because of financial stringency and the growth of the fleet, it proved impossible to adequately forecast required officer strength.

## Financial Independence?

Naval officers as gentlemen and professionals were constrained in their ability to agitate for increased pay and benefits since they were compelled to act as if they were semi-independent contractors providing a public service in exchange for a retaining fee.<sup>26</sup> To maintain respectability the Admiralty considered it necessary to maintain the polite fiction that officers were not dependent on their pay and that financial affairs were comparatively unimportant in relation to the intangible and psychic benefits of wearing the uniform and carrying out the duties of an officer.<sup>27</sup> Nor was this unique to the military, for as Lord Brassey advised, "living within one's income, whatever it may be...is the foundation of all true respectability."<sup>28</sup>

Parents, however, did not send their sons into the Navy expecting that they would become millionaires. Although the financial compensation was not high, the Navy did provide honourable employment. As one author advised the parents of a future cadet, "[d]o I want my boy to make money? If the answer is in the affirmative, close the book and take steps to destroy it before your son can read it."<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the author recounted the other benefits of naval service: "In the first place, it is an honourable

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<sup>26</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), D. Beatty Papers (BTY) 8/7, Memorandum by Beatty, 27 January 1925.

<sup>27</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8592/129, Pay of ex-rating officers, 1919. After receiving a complaint regarding pay from Lieutenant Ernest Ovenden, an Admiralty clerk minuted: "He [Ovenden] also complains that his expenses are greater as a result of his acceptance of a commission, but against this must be put, not only the higher status enjoyed by him as a Lieutenant, but also the considerable prospective benefits, both as regards full and retired pay which that rank confers."

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Brassey, "Education and Training," *Brassey's Naval Annual* (1887), 52.

<sup>29</sup> Gieve's Ltd., *How to Become a Naval Officer* (Portsmouth: Gieve's & Co., 1942), 2.

service, and the first line of defence of the greatest Empire the world has ever seen ... It is a profession in which the first essential ... is ... 'conduct becoming an officer and a gentleman.'"<sup>30</sup>

Generally speaking, officers without private income found it difficult to make ends meet, especially if they were married. Although officers received far greater pay than the average British worker, the lifestyle they expected (and were expected) to lead carried with it heavy expenses. Even as late as the 1920s, after the Jerram Committee's findings had significantly raised the pay of junior officers, it was difficult to meet all the obligations associated with a naval career.<sup>31</sup> Chronic debt was a problem, especially in the junior ranks. This was associated in particular with the sub-lieutenants' courses at Greenwich, where officers seemed to gravitate to the "evils" of London. A full investigation of such debts was carried out in 1894 under the direction of Captains Lewis Beaumont and Robert Stopford. The former suggested that if mess debts got too high, extras such as games and other entertainments should be stopped. Stopford dissented, however, arguing that "[t]o enforce such a rule would in my opinion have the effect of causing the Officers to seek recreation denied to them in College, outside and locally where, to say the least of it, the moral status is not high."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1728, Jerram Committee Report, 1917-1919; PRO, ADM 1/8559/139, Order in Council, 17 May 1920 on Jerram Committee Report, 1920. See also Molly Passmore, *In his Wake: Memoirs of a Naval Officer's Wife in the 1930s* (Braunton, Devon: Merlin Books, 1988), 31. Passmore's husband on full pay as a Lieutenant at about £6 per week spent nearly £4 on mess fees, uniforms and other assorted expenses. See also "Editorial," *Emmanuel Naval Review*, March 1919, 4, where one officer commented tartly that "[t]he coming increase in Naval pay is so great that the Rolls-Royce Co. is simply snowed under with orders."

<sup>32</sup> PRO, ADM 203/6, Report on Mess Expenses, 8 May 1894; and ADM 203/5, Admiralty to Admiral President, Royal Naval College, 21 June 1890. Sub Lieutenants William Macdonald and William Barkley



Other expenses, especially uniforms, were also high. Outfitters like Gieve's found it extremely profitable to extend credit to officers because it ensured their loyalty.<sup>33</sup> Officers were obligated to purchase at least ten different patterns of uniforms from full dress to tropical whites.<sup>34</sup> Those in responsible positions also paid out of their own pockets for extras such as gold leaf, tampions for the guns, and extra paint. Even midshipmen were tacitly expected to provide special decorative fittings in their boats. The cleanliness of vessels was also taken extremely seriously. One officer complained bitterly about being shelved as a captain as the result of an unfavourable report while he had commanded a battleship.<sup>35</sup> As the social status of the naval service increased this problem was exacerbated.

Indebtedness might induce an officer to evade debts or even to "liberate" funds from mess accounts or public sources.<sup>36</sup> Disputes over unpaid accounts, for instance, forced the Admiralty to refuse to furnish collectors with the private addresses of officers when they began to use their clubs as mail drops, thus making it difficult for the

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were found guilty of misconduct for "introducing women of immoral character into the Royal Naval College."

<sup>33</sup> David Gieve, *Gieve's & Hawke's, 1795-1985* (London: Gieve's & Hawke's, 1985), 23.

<sup>34</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1459A, Committee to Adjust Uniforms, 1915-1916.

<sup>35</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8383/176, Captain P. Nelson Ward to Admiralty, 17 April 1916. "...and that for one mistake it is a grievous penalty to reduce the pension of a man only 49 years of age, and to fling him out, without a word of sympathy or explanation, from the service to which he has devoted his life, and in which he has won the approbation of his seniors on all other occasions."

<sup>36</sup> "Naval Lieutenant Dismissed the Service," *The Times*, 9 February 1907. Lieutenant Charles M. Foot was found guilty of desertion and fraudulent conversion of ship's money and sentenced to six months imprisonment and dismissal from the service with disgrace.

Admiralty to despatch mobilization orders.<sup>37</sup> Fraudulent conversion of mess or public monies was punished severely and usually resulted in dismissal from the service. Fleet Paymaster Lowry received a three-year prison sentence for the theft of £13,000 in 1913.<sup>38</sup> In 1901, Lieutenant and Commander G.S.Q. Carr of H.M.S. *Circe* was convicted by court martial and dismissed from the service for the improper supervision of mess accounts.<sup>39</sup> Chronic debt might also lessen an officer's chances of promotion and might result in him being socially ostracized by being removed from the wardroom mess.<sup>40</sup> One junior officer who wrote a bad cheque to cover a debt to the Union Club at Malta was subsequently cashiered.<sup>41</sup>

Other expenses associated with the status of commissioned officer included entertainment, travelling, sport, hunting and even mundane items such as housekeeping, laundry and stationery. Especially in the lower ranks, but also among high-profile senior appointees, pay often failed to meet expenditures. Sub-Lieutenant Gordon Campbell found that mess fees cost him £8 per month when his pay amounted to only £7; to make

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<sup>37</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8363, File on Debts, 1913.

<sup>38</sup> PRO, ADM 178/11, Equalisation of Sentences Panel, 1914: See also, "Fleet Paymaster's Downfall," *The Times*, 10 February 1913, 10.

<sup>39</sup> PRO, ADM 116/125, Court Martial on Lt and Cdr. G.S.Q. Carr, 1902; the Admiralty commuted the sentence to retirement under the provision of the Misconduct Order in Council and was given a compassionate allowance of five shillings *per diem*.

<sup>40</sup> E.R. Fremantle, *The Navy As I Have Known It, 1849-1899* (London: Cassel, 1904), 17. See also PRO, ADM 7/929, Confidential Commanders' Book, case of Commander Laurens Malet who was denied promotion in 1883 for chronic complaints about debt; and ADM 203/2, Admiralty to Admiral Fanshawe. Fanshawe was reminded that he was "fully authorized to call on Officers to pay their Mess Debts out of their monthly advance and that should they fail to do so, they will be liable to be tried by Court Martial for disobedience..."

<sup>41</sup> CCAC, John M. de Robeck Papers (DRBK) 3/5, de Robeck to Admiralty, 22 April 1907.

up the difference he pawned his telescope and sextant.<sup>42</sup> Walter Cowan related similar tales about his time as a sub-lieutenant at Greenwich.

Always impecunious, every now and then we journeyed to London in search of adventure; once we found ourselves with but 9d between us and a long time to go before we had to return. Very hungry, we decided we would walk the length of Piccadilly and back in the hope of meeting someone we knew well enough perhaps to feed us...<sup>43</sup>

One of the trends that began to undermine the independent status of naval officers, particularly in the lower ranks, was the changing pattern in marriage. In the closing years of the nineteenth century officers were actively discouraged for a number of closely related reasons from marrying before reaching a certain age and rank. First, pay for junior officers, especially lieutenants, was too low to provide adequately for a family. Second, for related social reasons marriage was considered inadvisable since a family would have to be provided for in a style consistent with the status of commissioned officers, and this would leave little income for shipboard expenses.<sup>44</sup> Third, an officer could expect to serve extended overseas commissions away from his family for up to three years. Finally, there were social and professional pressures. As one writer commented sardonically,

Judging by the entire absence of encouragement given to British sailors and husbands and fathers it would appear that they were originally intended for a celibate life. The endeavour to keep them single may have been prompted by the desire, at once humane and

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<sup>42</sup> Gordon Campbell, *Number Thirteen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 40.

<sup>43</sup> W.S. Chalmers (ed.), *The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), 13.

<sup>44</sup> "Sailors' Wives," *United Service Magazine*, VII (May 1893), 807. "In turning to the matrimonial affairs of naval officers, the first point to notice is that the official rank of the husband is of considerable importance in determining the amount of discomfort and separation to be endured by him and his wife. To marry as a sub-lieutenant is as hopelessly silly and undesirable as it is fortunately rare."

economical, to limit the annual number of State-made widows and orphans.<sup>45</sup>

Married officers were called "bundle men," a nickname earned by a reputation for being no fun aboard ship. Indeed, many senior officers thought them less efficient than their single counterparts.<sup>46</sup> Many such officers finished their careers in the Coast Guard, where they could expect steady pay and yet remain in home waters.

This situation meant that ambitious officers generally delayed marriage until they reached their mid-thirties. For instance, Ernle Chatfield did not marry until 1909 at the age of thirty-five, as a freshly-promoted captain. However, there were exceptions to this rule: Fisher, for example, married as a lieutenant while others, like Arthur Wilson, remained bachelors.<sup>47</sup> As early as 1859 concerns were raised that the naval profession was not replacing itself. W. Farr noted that while 71 per cent of males between the ages of thirty and thirty-five were wed, only 44 per cent of naval officers were.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Farr argued that late marriage tended to produce bad morals and disease. This argument was certainly borne out by the returns of sexually transmitted diseases in the naval service.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 806.

<sup>46</sup> A.E.M. Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence* (London: Heinemann, 1942), 29.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; and Ernle Bradford, *The Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson* (London: John Murray, 1923).

<sup>48</sup> W. Farr, "The Application of Statistics to Naval and Military Matters," *RUSI*, III, No. 10 (1859), 212.

<sup>49</sup> Returns of the medical service were provided to Parliament annually. While it is impossible to determine the proportion of officers infected, it is difficult to believe that they were immune. Naval figures were high, however. For instance, the rate of treatment for syphilis was 43.42 per thousand in 1879; see *BPP*, "Statistical Report on the Health of the Navy for 1879," vol. XLIV, No. 375 (1879), 23.

Still, the situation changed by the time of the Great War, as more officers disregarded the unwritten injunction against marriage. Gordon Campbell was about to marry as a lieutenant in October 1910 when his commanding officer indicated he would not have a married officer in his ship. Campbell "pointed out that I did not consider that the Navy had any claim on one's personal life."<sup>50</sup> The wave of officers joining the service just before the First World War led to considerable public pressure on the Admiralty to institute a wage scale that would enable them to meet their mess fees and support a wife and family. In the ensuing years large numbers of younger officers demanded more flexibility in their family circumstances. In the context of wartime inflation in 1914-1918, the Admiralty was hard pressed to meet their demands.

Prejudice against married junior officers continued after the war despite improvements in pay and allowances. Molly Passmore, who married her husband when he was a freshly minted lieutenant in 1929, had a conversation with an unnamed admiral who tactlessly stated his belief that juniors who married were less efficient. Passmore responded:

Now may I present the other aspect of the picture, which naturally I know from my own experience. With the exception of the Captain, Peter [her husband] is the only married officer in his ship. He is the last to come ashore in the evening, as the bachelors all dash off in their cars to London as soon as possible. He is usually the first back on board in the morning, not having so far to go, and with a clear head having soberly gone to bed at 10pm. Also, he puts everything he has into his work, and with the added responsibility of a wife to maintain, he does not make mistakes.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Campbell, *Number Thirteen*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Passmore, *In His Wake*, 31.

Indeed, many officers were close to rebellion after the war. Molly Passmore recalled how difficult it was for she and her husband to make ends meet after their marriage. While her spouse's income amounted to £6 per week, more than £2 went towards his mess fees, regardless of the cost of uniforms and kit. And neither partner had any private income. In 1921, Admiral Boardman, the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, coldly refused to meet with a Government M.P. on the grounds "that I had no wish to hear a Member of the Government so long as marriage allowance was withheld from Naval Officers."<sup>52</sup> At the time, Beatty and Bridgeman, the First Lord, were engaged in a struggle with the Treasury over the extension of marriage allowances to officers. In a memorandum Beatty wrote that:

The officers have been very patient and have behaved exceedingly well. They have made no efforts by *sub rosa* methods or otherwise to air their troubles in public, in the press, or in any other way, but the fact that they have refrained from giving publicity to their grievances does not mean that their feelings are less strong.... The loyalty, which has been strained unduly in doing justice, cannot be taxed much more, and I feel I cannot remain responsible for the discipline of the Navy if the question is ruled out in face of the overwhelming evidence which has been produced.<sup>53</sup>

The Admiralty was forced to offer marriage allowances and to recognize the fact that large numbers of officers elected to marry during the war years. Whitehall found it difficult to dismiss out of hand an officer's wish to marry while he was risking his life for his country.

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<sup>52</sup> NMM, BTY 8/7, Admiral Boardman to Frank Spickernell, 22 February 1927.

<sup>53</sup> NMM, BTY 8/7, Memorandum by Beatty, 27 January 1925.



The situation was further aggravated by the introduction of commissioned officers promoted from the lower deck. The Admiralty found itself in a bind over their promotion because it had to make it worthwhile financially for them to exchange a situation where they could meet their financial obligations for one as an inferior commissioned officer with little chance of further promotion. Many of these men were older and were already married. At the same time, there was a problem in that officers entering in the usual way had to foot the bill themselves. It seemed to smack of favouritism to foster these prospective officers while the others, some of them no better off financially than enlisted personnel, were left to fend for themselves.<sup>54</sup> Officers, taking on the values of the wider professional world, demanded that they should have the same opportunities and similar pay as other professions.

## Command

When asked by General Sir John Maxwell why naval officers seemed to be much more self-reliant than their army brethren, Admiral Mark Kerr put it down to early entry and early responsibility.

I replied that the naval officer has a great advantage, on account of the early age when he is first put in a position of responsibility. At fifteen years old he is put in charge of a boat, and is responsible for the lives

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<sup>54</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1692, Hyde Parker Committee on Promotion and Conditions of Service of Warrant Officers, 1918-1919. "These anomalies [in benefits between regular and ex-rating officers] have been patiently and silently endured by direct entry Officers up to date without official protest. We think that they hold back because of their high sense of loyalty to the Admiralty, inbred in them by the rigid disciplinary ideas and the traditions of the Service which were impressed on them through out the whole of their early training." See also NMM, H.W. Richmond Papers (RIC) 7/4, Commander Harrison-Smith to Richmond, 8 August 1912.



and safety of the crew and any damage that may be done to the boat... During all his youth he is in a position of trust, where he is responsible for the lives of the crew and the safety of his vessel.<sup>55</sup>

One of the intangible benefits of possessing a commission in the Royal Navy was a combination of subordination and independence. At every stage of an officer's training and education, attempts were made to balance strict subordination to superiors with celebrations of individual achievement. Officers were expected to do more than merely obey the orders of superiors; they were also expected to gain experience in handling men and exercising command. Despite the narrowness of the groove that all officers were supposedly forced to pass through, there was not merely a toleration of the idiosyncrasy of senior officers but a belief that those who had such personalities were particularly able to extract the best results from subordinates. The Royal Navy had been very tolerant of men like Lord Charles Beresford, and there seemed to be a great deal of room for prickly but able individuals like Robert Arbuthnot, Kenneth Dewar and Herbert Richmond. Even the "Young Turk" rebels who caused no end of trouble for the Admiralty managed to find themselves on the flag list. Individuality among ratings was also valued as long as a strict subordination to the quarterdeck was maintained. As Beresford argued before a Royal United Services Institution meeting about the Admiralty's policy regarding "bad hats,"

I was rather a scamp myself, I am afraid; but depend upon it a great number of men of this kind ... who have been sent out of the Service are the very men you want to fight... As a rule, the best boy in the school is the biggest "pickle" he has the pluck to get into, and the scamps are very often the best men you have got. A scamp is a good chap, always was, always ready for a fight.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Mark Kerr, *The Navy in My Time* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1934), 25-26.

<sup>56</sup> Gerard Noel, "On the Training of the Executive Branch of the Navy," *RUSI*, XXXIII (June 1889), 817, comments by Beresford.

Another officer exhorted his professional readers to "Distinguish between the *genial* blackguard and the common or garden type."<sup>57</sup>

Sail training and early responsibility were believed to develop the spiritual aspects of command, whereas mechanistic factors seemed to limit the boundaries of executive action. Along with the complete mechanization of the fleet, uncertainties in British economic and political security and the experience of the Boer War served to convince many in the wider society and the political elite of the value of efficiency and the need to extract the most power from every farthing expended by the state. This was especially the case with the armed forces after the British Army had been exposed to criticism even more devastating than that experienced at the close of the Crimean War.

The Boer War convinced the British electorate that efficient management of the armed forces was vital and that the word of generals and admirals could not necessarily be trusted.<sup>58</sup> Hence, centralized management and control were required not merely over the great fleets but also to limit the liability on Westminster's resources both financially and militarily wherever Britain's imperial rivals were extending their control on the periphery. Realizing the problems associated with leaving the imperial enterprise to the

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<sup>57</sup> A Watchkeeper, *Five Minutes to One Bell: A Few Hints to Junior Watchkeepers* (Portsmouth: Gieve's, 1916), 14.

<sup>58</sup> For an example see, Linesman, "The Mechanism of War IV The Officer's Officer," *The Spectator*, 1 March 1902.

man on the spot, British governments moved to rein in his independence and initiative.<sup>59</sup> The Boer War demonstrated the need for centralized control and increased the apparent need to impose tighter direction over the armed forces. In essence, a political need to tighten the bounds of control fed into the technical and organizational capacity to centralize executive action and the command functions at Whitehall.<sup>60</sup>

In the aftermath of the Boer War, the Balfour government established the Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D.) to confirm the primacy of Cabinet in this area. Senior officers were assigned as advisers, and a Secretariat was established to coordinate policy. The reorganization of the War Office and the establishment of a General Staff were triggered by a full Committee investigation under Viscount Esher and Admiral Sir John Fisher.<sup>61</sup> Yet not until Fisher's retirement 1910 and the abysmal failure of his successor, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, to enunciate a coherent strategy for a potential war with Germany in 1911 was Admiralty re-organization regarded necessary.<sup>62</sup>

Nonetheless, steps were already in train even before the Fisher years to limit the independence of commanders-in-chief and the authority of senior officers relative to the Admiralty. The collision between the *Victoria* and the *Camperdown* abruptly ended the

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<sup>59</sup> Mike O'Brien, "A School of Manliness: British Officers on the Frontiers of the Empire, 1898-1914" (Unpublished seminar presentation, Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 15 July 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Franklyn Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885-1959* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 40-47.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-70; and John Gooch, "The Creation of the British General Staff, 1904-1914," *RUSI*, CXVI (1971), 50-53.

<sup>62</sup> Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919* (5 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1961), I, 239-246. Indeed, the resulting pressure for change not only triggered a flurry of Admiralty activity but also attracted the intense attention of the Committee of Imperial Defence. See PRO, Cabinet Papers (CAB) 1/31, Memoranda on naval war staff, 1911.

experiments with decentralized battle tactics and showed, as Andrew Gordon has demonstrated, the importance of the need to rigidly control subordinate officers in tactical evolutions.<sup>63</sup> The quest for “smartness” reached the level where it distorted and invalidated the purpose for having such drills in the first place. As Admiral Fitzgerald argued,

... the more one looks, or tries to look, at this question from an impartial and unprejudiced point of view, the more one fails to appreciate the logic of the “sail drillers,” and the more it appears to partake of that method of argument which Professor Huxley is so fond of calling the *a priori* method a which assumes that because such and such a process has produced so and so in the past, therefore it will produce so and so... in the future, notwithstanding that the conditions have totally changed.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, Herbert Richmond complained bitterly in his diary after an unsatisfactory discussion with Admiral Sir William May’s Chief of Staff, Captain Archibald Moore:

The fact is, of course, that people like Moore, and unfortunately the Service is made up of them, have been so occupied all their lives in making their ships “smart”, burnishing bollards or over-reaching other people in the Fleet so as to get out a bower anchor before another man, or swindling at drill, or making record shooting under conditions utterly different from action conditions, that they have never had time to ready & study.<sup>65</sup>

Competitive drill led many officers to pursue shortcuts and “cheats” to beat squadron mates, but it also had an aura of unreality that was difficult to dispel even when

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<sup>63</sup> Gordon, *Rules of the Game*.

<sup>64</sup> C.C.P. Fitzgerald, “The War Training of the Navy III: A Reply to Sir G. Hornby,” *United Service Magazine*, II (November 1890), 125.

<sup>65</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 50, diary entry 2 May 1909.

the gunnery revolution swept the fleet.<sup>66</sup> Battle practice and prize firing increasingly bore little resemblance to reality and may have, for instance, played a role in the rejection of the Pollen system of fire control before the war.<sup>67</sup> This reached its extreme when individual captains were ordered to follow the evolutions of the flag ship in matters as minor as the hanging of laundry and the hoisting of boats while individuality was driven out of the cadet by the nature of life afloat where nothing was done without direct orders.<sup>68</sup> Admiral Sir Arthur Moore recalled the fury of the senior captain in the squadron (the admiral was ashore) when he, as a junior captain, had ordered the sails brought in before being ordered to do so because of a rapidly approaching typhoon. "This was the only time in the whole of my service that I disobeyed the order of a senior officer, but the safety of my ship was my first duty and before I could acknowledge [the signal] the typhoon struck."<sup>69</sup>

While cultural values and the nature of executive command became increasingly centralized, the tools at the disposal of the Admiralty to effect direct executive command

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<sup>66</sup> St. Barbara, "Fool Gunnery in the Navy," *Blackwood's*, CLXXXIII, No. 1108 (1908), 308-309. See also, Brian Schofield, "'Jacky' Fisher, H.M.S. *Indomitable* and the Dogger Bank Action: A Personal Memoir," in Gerald Jordan (ed.), *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1945: Essays in Honour of Arthur Marder* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 69. Admiral Schofield recounted the remarkable ascent of a ship's commander due to tricks of winning such competitions.

<sup>67</sup> Jon Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 333-334. Alfred H. Pollen offered the Royal Navy a mechanical computer that enabled a continuous fire control solution to be maintained on a moving target *regardless* of the movement or course change of the firing vessel. It offered a solution to intractable problem of calculating changes in the rate of change of range, or range rate. The system adopted was that developed by Lieutenant (later Admiral Sir) Frederic Dreyer that proved inferior in that it was not helm free. In other words a steady course had to be maintained in order to achieve an accurate solution.

<sup>68</sup> Dewar, *Navy from Within*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> E. M. Moore (ed.), *Adventure in the Royal Navy: The Life and Letters of Admiral Sir Arthur William Moore* (Liverpool: E.M. Moore, 1964), 65.

over the movement of ships and squadrons became greater. Not surprisingly, there was an almost incredible temptation from the centre, especially to men who had commanded squadrons and fleets, to interfere with the man on the spot. As Cyprian Bridge wrote:

Interference with officers on the spot and many thousands of miles away by fussy personages at headquarters has been greatly facilitated by the improvements in means of communication, and an admiral or divisional senior officers whom Nature has not endowed with the gift of self-reliance finds it difficult to resist the temptation to use the facilities for “requesting instructions” placed within his reach by the rapid steamer and the telegraphic cable.<sup>70</sup>

Such interference had a more subtle influence over the prerogatives of officers afloat as the Admiralty increased its ability to restrict the freedom of action of commanders in chief. In particular, the centralization of command under way during the Fisher years led to the clash with Lord Charles Beresford who commanded the Channel Fleet. Under the impression that he was to be “Admiralissimo” in home waters in the event of a major war, Beresford was determined to resist Admiralty dominance. Furthermore, the re-distribution of the fleet in 1904-1905 and again in 1912 lessened the status of foreign stations. Indeed, an Admiralty memorandum argued that wireless communications and the use of flying squadrons of fast battle ships or armoured cruisers would provide imperial defence more effectively than tying down significant resources around the globe.<sup>71</sup> Senior officers resented the re-distribution, and Admiral Sir Gerard

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<sup>70</sup> Bridge, “Re-Distribution of the Fleet,” 602.

<sup>71</sup> PRO, ADM 116/3108, Admiralty Memorandum on Wireless Telegraphy, 1908.

Noel had to be restrained from striking his flag on the China station when the last battleships in his squadron were sent home.<sup>72</sup>

Such centralization led to problems between the Admiralty and its previously semi-independent Commanders-in-Chief, particularly in Home Waters. As a 1908 Admiralty memorandum put it:

The ordering of the strategic movements of the fleet is dependent on the information that comes in from time to time from the various sources. In former days, before the advent of wireless telegraphy, the system was that the Admiralty issued certain general orders indicating the general line to be followed, and the Admirals at sea acted on these instructions to the best of their ability, and they were dependent solely for their information on the very slow and imperfect means then existing for obtaining news by means of cruisers and visual signalling.<sup>73</sup>

While wireless telegraphy greatly enhanced the capacity to issue executive orders, the Admiralty lacked the administrative arrangements to co-ordinate movements in an efficient and timely fashion. The Naval War Staff, which was established in 1912, represented an attempt to centralize command decisions. Also, the Admiralty mandated that staff officers should be specialists and that the structure of a staff in active commands should exactly mirror the structure in London.<sup>74</sup> This had the result of circumscribing the freedom of flag officers to select their own staffs.

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<sup>72</sup> Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I, 85; See also National Maritime Museum (NMM), G. Noel Papers (NOE) 20E, Fisher to Noel, 3 March 1905, where Fisher attempted to calm Noel by asking him "please not [to] mind the raid we have made on your fleet."

<sup>73</sup> PRO, ADM 116/3108, Wireless Telegraphy in War, 4 August 1908.

<sup>74</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/120, "Memorandum – The Necessity for Co-ordinating Staff Work Afloat," 18 October 1911; and CAB 17/8, Memorandum by G. Ballard, 1 November 1911; "Prior preparation is not only the most effective but is also THE CHEAPEST form of defence – money not spent according to the closely investigated needs for security is money and resources wasted."



Even worse was that Admiralty control was tightened without the development of an effective system to ensure that an activist First Lord like Winston Churchill could not hijack (in the view of professional officers) operational control from the First Sea Lord and whatever staff existed at the Admiralty.<sup>75</sup> In the spring of 1914, Churchill ordered elements of the Atlantic Fleet under Rear Admiral Lewis Bayly to prepare to intervene in the Ulster crisis, thus bypassing the Commander-in-Chief and threatening to provoke the resignation of several officers with important connections to the Ulster Unionists, like Admiral Sir George Callaghan, who commanded the Home Fleet (soon to be renamed the Grand Fleet).<sup>76</sup> This tendency to usurp the authority of the executive officers in the Admiralty resulted in the resignation of Fisher and Churchill's subsequent downfall as First Lord in the spring of 1915. Furthermore, since orders to the Fleet at this time passed through the hands of the civilian Secretary's Department at the Admiralty, it was entirely possible that orders could be generated without reference to the professional members of the Board.

Centralization of authority at the turn of the twentieth century was not unique to the Admiralty; similar trends were visible in the War, Colonial and Foreign Offices. The experience of the Boer War finally discredited many of the swashbuckling efforts of empire builders on the periphery of Empire.<sup>77</sup> In response to financial crisis and re-

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<sup>75</sup> BPP, "First Report of the Dardanelles Commission," vol. X, Cd. 8490 (1917-18), 431; Barry Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871-1946* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 44-45.

<sup>76</sup> Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Jeffrey, "The Royal Navy and the Curragh Incident," *Historical Research*, LXII (1989), 54-69.

<sup>77</sup> O'Brien, "A School of Manliness."

orientation of its focus, the Admiralty felt compelled to take part in day-to-day management at a level that hitherto had not been attempted.

During this time a change in the culture of command was occurring. Command decisions over even relatively minor details were not only being centralized in the Admiralty but also down the line in individual admirals and commanders-in-chief. This left a decreasing zone of independence for other subordinate ranks. This process was aided by the development of the wireless and the redeployment of the fleet into squadrons of evolution and concentration in home waters. As the Royal Navy faced increased global competition, it was forced to integrate even its overseas detachments into homogeneous squadrons to insure that these detachments could fulfil imperial and trade defence duties.<sup>78</sup> Individual commanders-in-chief were under increasing pressure to keep tabs on their subordinates.

Shifts in the culture of command also affected the latitude given to officers to discipline their men. Although the flogging of ratings was abolished before this period, a pattern of the cat-of-nine tails was kept on board ships. While the flogging of non-Caucasians was still permitted as late as 1914, such practices now had to be approved by the Admiralty. For instance, the Commander-in-Chief at the Cape of Good Hope was forced to request permission from London to have Arab and Somali stokers flogged. While this permission was granted with the observation that "Discipline must be maintained & you should take whatever steps are necessary in dealing with Arab and

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<sup>78</sup> Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I, 38-45.

Somali mutineers” the point is that in the nineteenth century no commander overseas would have had to ask.<sup>79</sup>

As a result of social and political changes, the Admiralty and naval officers in general had to be careful when managing personnel. In the case of courts martial, the head of the Naval Law Branch warned that “[t]he proceedings at a Home Port in a case likely to excite general interest are published at great length in *The Times* and there are always lying in wait naval and Legal Experts who would be prepared to pounce upon any Finding which appeared to them to have flaw in it.”<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, the rights and privileges of the executive officer corps were becoming increasingly circumscribed as the influences of financial limitation, the assertion of the battle fleet doctrine, technology and organizational changes took place. Moreover, the very importance of the growing fleet offered a more direct challenge to the status and professional space of executive naval officers.

### Crisis in Numbers

Throughout the nineteenth century one of the constant problems faced by the Admiralty and the executive officer corps was the flow of promotion and the supply of new recruits to its ranks. In the half century after 1815, the difficulty was not a lack of commissioned

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<sup>79</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8404/450, Admiralty to CINC, Cape, 30 November 1914.

<sup>80</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8100, Memorandum on Courts Martial by George Hoste, 8 February 1909.

officers but a flooded market of ageing men with little prospect of employment.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, non-effective charges in the form of half pay and pensions made steady inroads into Navy Estimates. However, from the passage of the Naval Defence Act of 1889 to the outbreak of the Great War, the problem was a dearth of deck officers concurrent with the naval service increasing not merely in absolute size but also in complexity of required skills. The shortfall in officer numbers by 1914 forced the Admiralty, despite being largely dominated by senior line officers, to redefine the informal contract that bound the executive officer corps to the state.

The induction of officers into a naval service is an exercise in “social calculus.” Administrators are faced with difficult choices, as they must navigate between the competing demands of equity, economy and efficiency.<sup>82</sup> The first requirement of officers was that they should be in sufficient quality and quantity to provide effective and efficient leadership in the event of international complications. As Admiral Lord Charles Beresford wrote:

The fighting efficiency of the Royal Navy depends first of all upon the quality and the ability of its officers. Therefore the selection, the education and the training of officers are matters of paramount importance. And not only do they affect the Navy, but they intimately affect those hundreds of families who give their sons to the service of their country.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Steward Ross, *Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman: The Life and Times of an Officer and a Gentleman* (Cambridge: Pearson, 1998), 28. Ross comments there were plenty of Admirals “well past their ‘sell-by date.’”

<sup>82</sup> Donald Chisholm, *Waiting for Dead Man's Shoes: Origins and Development of the U.S. Navy's Officer Personnel System, 1793-1941* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 28-32.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Beresford, *The Betrayal* (London: P.S. King, 1912), 2.

The efficiency of these officers had been a preoccupation of the Admiralty throughout the nineteenth century when it attempted to assure that officers were young and fit enough to take up active command.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the various education committees from 1870 onwards attempted to ensure that officers were adequately prepared for active service.

Second, in view of the vital importance of morale and zeal, administrators had to demonstrate due regard for the interests of its servants. This was especially the case with commissioned officers, who were specially trained from childhood to provide executive leadership and had certain expectations regarding appointments and promotion. In the case of an officer class that possessed considerable social and political power, this proved especially difficult. As the Admiralty solicitor wrote in 1913 while considering the virtually unlimited power of the Board in personnel matters:

The assumption underlying the legal position is of course that the Crown will observe in its dealings with its servants the highest degree of good faith – subject only to this, that the public interest is paramount, and the every officer holds his position upon the footing that the Crown has the right to deal with him as the public interest requires.<sup>85</sup>

Even though the Admiralty, as the agent of the Crown, possessed virtually unlimited power to regulate personnel matters, in practice that power was constrained by political and practical realities.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, a firm appreciation of the financial cost associated with the maintenance of the corps was required. Rapid variations, in both

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<sup>84</sup> John Beeler, “‘Fit for Service Abroad’: Promotion, Retirement and Royal Navy Officers, 1830-1890, *Mariner’s Mirror*, LXXXI, No.3 (1994), 300-312.

<sup>85</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8370/65, Minute by Admiralty solicitor, 3 June 1913.

absolute size and proportion in each rank, were to be avoided since they increased the burdens on budgets. Augmentations to the permanent officer corps, or any increase in promotion imposed costs, were felt well beyond the immediate fiscal year. Indeed, contemporary policy decisions could continue to affect the Navy's finances for a half-century or more. For instance, in 1912 the Accountant General calculated that the addition of one hundred Royal Naval Reserve (R.N.R.) officers into regular service would incur a £750,000 liability on future estimates from 1913 to 1958, when Mr. Ryles calculated that these officers would no longer be collecting pensions.<sup>86</sup> Already in 1905 the Admiralty was spending almost £1 million per year on pensions.<sup>87</sup> Further, even if the Admiralty decided that such charges were warranted, Treasury approval had to be obtained. Ever wary of Admiralty attempts to wrestle concessions, the Treasury put up substantial resistance to any programme or policy that seemed too costly or set, at least in its view, a bad precedent. For instance, attempts by the Admiralty to lower entry costs to cadets and to offer incentives for lower deck officers were vigorously opposed and triggered a direct exchange between the First Lord and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>88</sup>

Managing a rapidly expanding naval service in an uncertain international climate, the Admiralty had to struggle constantly with these problems. When this expansion was coupled with the new skills required to build, maintain and fight a modern steel navy, this management issue was even more critical. Other branches of service, such as engineering,

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<sup>86</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8363; see also ADM 7/994, *Naval Necessities*, vol. II, 73.

<sup>87</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7858, Admiralty to Treasury, 7 December 1905.

<sup>88</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8402/422, Chancellor of the Exchequer to First Lord, 17 July 1914.

accounting and administrative services, took a greater and greater share of the Admiralty's time and resources. Further, the skills and training required by executive officers increased dramatically at the same time as heavier demands for commissioned personnel took place. This problem grew geometrically, as Churchill alluded to in the sketch estimates for 1914-1915.<sup>89</sup>

Executive officers had the responsibility of command and were expected to provide the leadership that would secure the safety of the empire. Before the 1860s, without a system of retirement beyond the provision of half pay, the Navy was glutted with literally thousands of officers, most of whom had no realistic hope of employment. Nor was there incentive for officers to remove themselves from the list, especially for those who had reached the rank of post captain. Even if such an officer were never to see further sea service, he would automatically become an admiral by seniority. The starkest example was Admiral of the Fleet Sir Provo Wallis, who died at the age of 100 having been on the active list for 94 years.<sup>90</sup>

The problem was not a simple matter of mindlessly adding more officers. Rapid expansion of the intake of officer candidates was first of all expensive. The training system would have to be expanded, more berths would have to be found in gunrooms of the fleet, increased demand for the services of naval instructors and finally the costs of employing the midshipman when he became an officer all needed to be considered. Further, expansion in the intake of officers would take too long to have immediate effect.

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<sup>89</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/20, "Sketch Estimates for 1914-15.

<sup>90</sup> William C. Heine, *Ninety-Six Years in the Royal Navy* (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot, 1987). Wallis had been entered onto a ship's books at the age of six.



Prior to the advent of the Selborne Scheme in 1902 it took the Navy more than seven years to produce a competent deck officer, afterwards it took nine. Finally, rapid intake in a short period of time would distort the normal flow of promotion that was considered the foundation of the efficiency of the officer corps. As one officer wrote:

Most of us are very human; some few are impelled to do their duty in spite of everything, and even at times, and in rare cases, to their own detriment; but in the minds of most of us the EGO looms very large indeed, and our incentive to work is the reward to be gained. Some strive for pieces of ribbon, and others for pounds, shillings and pence; but the main idea of all is to obtain promotion, and this is their primary incentive to zeal. It follows logically that when promotion is barred, zeal, which at the best is more or less exotic, becomes an attenuated plant.<sup>91</sup>

The blockage in promotion caused by the heavy intake of new officers in a few very short years caused considerable difficulties as George King noted in a memorandum prepared for the Admiralty.

This congestion is due to the abnormally large entries of Naval Cadets in 1896 onwards, which were first made to meet the actual requirements on the Lieutenants' List as laid down by Order in Council of 29<sup>th</sup> November 1898 - that is 1,550 - but were subsequently maintained to provide for the anticipated needs of a rapidly expanding fleet. This would not have presented difficulties if the expansion was spread over twenty years ... but compressed as they were into a period of a few years, it was inevitable that at a later period large numbers of Lieutenants would come into the promotion zone together, with a consequent block in promotion.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Telescope, "Zeal in the Navy," *United Service Magazine*, vol. XXVI, no. 890 (January 1903), 331.

<sup>92</sup> PRO, Treasury Papers (T) 1/11192, Memorandum by George King, 1908; see also ADM 116/2462, Memorandum by Captain Hugh Tweedie; and BPP, Report of the Select Committee on Navy Estimates," vol. XII, No. 142 (1888), 545, testimony of Admiral Sir John Hopkins. "Exactly so, and therefore we are very little desirous of increasing the lieutenants' list if it can possibly be avoided, because that would only lead to there being a greater number of discontented men."

King, an actuary from the National Debt Office, calculated that the promotion prospects for these officers were “totally inadequate” and would not reach equilibrium until 1923.<sup>93</sup>

In the years following 1889, the solution to the shortage of deck officers in the near term was to offer regular commissions to R.N.R. officers. Known as the “Hungry Hundred,” these officers would be followed by the “Famished Fifty,” who would serve as a stopgap.<sup>94</sup> The 1893 Hoskins Committee discovered that the Navy would be short of considerable numbers of lieutenants in the coming years. This problem was especially vexing because of the need to man the new torpedo boat destroyers then entering service and the requirements of the expanded battle fleet. At the time an Admiralty study calculated that a smooth and orderly programme to expand officer intake through *Britannia* would take until 1911!<sup>95</sup> This was unacceptable to the Admiralty. Although these officers were to have the same privileges as regular officers, their prospects of advancing beyond lieutenant were virtually nil. Hence, they would not block the promotion of ex-cadet officers.<sup>96</sup> Still, there were drawbacks to this mechanism because it

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7727, Admiralty to Treasury, March 1895.

<sup>95</sup> PRO, ADM 116/881, Hoskins Committee, 1893.

<sup>96</sup> This could be justified on the grounds that merchant officers were not necessarily competent in the application of force at sea. See, J.K. Laughton, Naval Promotion Arithmetically and Historically Considered,” *RUSI*, XXIV, No. 106 (1881), 555, comments by Vice Admiral Selwyn. “Day by day the naval Officer is varying more and more widely from the seaman of the mercantile marine. I have made many passages backwards and forwards in the American liners. Now what has an Officer to do there? They have often told me themselves that practically all they have to do is to take a floating hotel from one side of the ocean to the other.”

was merely temporary, removed officers from the pool of available reserves in the event of war, and faced a gauntlet of Treasury criticism.<sup>97</sup>

The Treasury balked particularly at the Admiralty request that these commissions be long term, desiring instead that they be merely temporary and that the supplementary R.N.R. officers be ineligible for pensions or half pay.<sup>98</sup> Realizing that there were few incentives for reserve officers to trade the merchant marine for “hard lying”<sup>99</sup> service in destroyers, where they would be second-class commissioned officers, the Admiralty argued successfully that these men must be offered benefits identical to those given to regular entry officers.<sup>100</sup> This recruitment inaugurated a fairly regular trend. A further fifty of these new officers were recruited in 1898, for example. When another crisis in officer numbers came in 1913, the Admiralty looked for an additional 100 reserve officers for regular service and by the end of the year sought another forty.<sup>101</sup>

The problem with this supply of officers was that they were entered so that they would not compete with regular entry officers either in obtaining premier appointments or promotions. Consequently, the Admiralty found it extremely difficult to attract officers in this fashion. Moreover, the system also in essence “relocated” the shortage. In the event

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<sup>97</sup> Indeed, this proved a problem during the war. See PRO, ADM 1/8478/5, Report on Conference on R.N.R. officers, 1917.

<sup>98</sup> Short service commissions were granted with the understanding that the individual was contracted to provide service for a number of years with severely reduced or even non-existent pension benefits. Further, such men were virtually debarred from further promotion.

<sup>99</sup> “Hard lying” was a term denoted for service that was considered particularly arduous. Considering the discomforts of serving in early destroyers, officers were granted special allowances.

<sup>100</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7277, Memorandum on RNR officers, 1895.

<sup>101</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8363, Distribution of Officers for Mobilisation, 1913.

of war, taking officers away from the R.N.R. would simply create another gap in the available resources.<sup>102</sup>

Another step, though one that is often missed, was part of the Selborne education reforms of December 1902. This entailed the more efficient use of officer resources.<sup>103</sup> The idea was that all three combat arms were to be integrated into one corps that would not merely enable engineer and marine officers to obtain executive command but would provide the Admiralty with an officer corps able to adjust to changing requirements.<sup>104</sup>

The intention behind the Selborne Scheme was to solve a series of interlocking problems that had plagued the Navy for several decades. First, it was designed to deal with the long-standing dispute between deck and engineering officers and to properly integrate technical education into the training programme for the former. Second, it was intended to permit a more flexible use of officer resources by the Admiralty. Considering the cost of the employment and training of Marine and engineering officers, the Selborne Scheme and the modifications proposed by the Douglas Education Committee of 1906 envisioned that officers could at several points in their career revert to the line.<sup>105</sup> Hence, considering the uncertain future, it made sense to have officers firmly grounded in all aspects of deck duties early in their careers. As Fisher estimated in 1906, the Admiralty

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<sup>102</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7714, Report on Naval Reserves, paragraph 17.

<sup>103</sup> BPP, "Memorandum dealing with the Entry, Training and Employment of Officers and Men of the Royal Navy and of the Royal Marines," vol. LXX, Cd. 1385 (1902), 675.

<sup>104</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (3 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), find reference to efficient use of officer resources. See also, "The New Admiralty Scheme," *The Times*, 8 January 1903.

<sup>105</sup> BPP, "Reports of Departmental Committee Appointed to Consider Certain Questions Concerning the Extension of the New Scheme of Training for Officers of the Navy," vol. LXX, Cd. 2841 (1906).

would be short approximately 900 combatant officers in the event of a major war, while there were some 500 Marine officers who could be, under the provisions of the New Scheme, trained to stand watch, thus making the most of existing officer resources.<sup>106</sup>

Unfortunately, this plan could not be realized for at least two decades until these new officers reached the fleet in significant numbers. As Donald Bittner has demonstrated, the effects of the Scheme were merely to reduce the regular supply of Marine officers to the point where the Admiralty was forced to revert to former recruiting and training practices.<sup>107</sup> The same held true in the case of engineering officers because the Osborne Dartmouth system was biased toward keeping the quarterdeck supplied as opposed to the engine room.<sup>108</sup> Finally, the scheme exacerbated the already difficult problem of lead-time in the preparation of young officers by extending it to nine years and erecting further financial barriers. As early as 1895 Admiral Sir Frederick Richards had found that predicting officer requirements fifteen months in advance was practically impossible.<sup>109</sup> In light of the rapid expansion of the fleet, the supply could not coincide with demand even in peacetime.

Early entry was again emphasized and extra requirements were added in the colleges. Cadets were entered at Osborne at thirteen, where they undertook a two-year

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<sup>106</sup> CCAC, J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR) 1/15/198, Fisher to Prince of Wales, 15 April 1906.

<sup>107</sup> Donald Bittner, "Shattered Images: Officers of the Royal Marines, 1867-1913," *Journal of Military History*, LIX, No. 1 (1995), 34.

<sup>108</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8451/281, McKenna Report on Naval Engineering, 1918. See also ADM 7/995, Naval Necessities, vol. III, Memorandum by Rosslyn Wemyss. "I have observed a tendency on the part of the parents of some of the cadets at Osborne to hope at least their sons might never become Lieutenants (E), with no chance of commanding ships or fleets, and I have a suspicion that, for this reason, they have in some cases even discouraged their sons in their engineering studies."

<sup>109</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7277, minute by Richards, 1895; see also T 1/11129, King Actuarial Report.

course, followed closely by a further two at Dartmouth. They went to sea in training ships at the age at seventeen. That was followed by active service in the fleet for approximately three years. After passing the required examinations, young officers served as sub-lieutenants and generally received their commissions as lieutenants at the age of twenty-two. This lengthy process complicated the existing problem because the expansion of the fleet required the Board of Admiralty to project nearly a decade ahead. As of April 1914, the Admiralty was looking forward to requirements for 1920.<sup>110</sup>

Further, the rapid expansion of the fleet seriously (and perhaps irreparably) damaged the principle of common entry enshrined in the Selborne Scheme. Entrants from the lower deck, the public schools, or the merchant service would not possess the technical education and engineering background that regular line officers did. Indeed, the Admiralty was so short of engineering officers in 1913 that candidates destined for the engineering branch departed from the standard year at sea as deck officers to begin their specialized education immediately.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the extension of the mate scheme to engine room artificers obviously meant that these men would not qualify as deck officers. Although the Second Sea Lord recognized that this undercut the principles of the new programme of training, he accepted that there was little choice. “On the other hand we are faced with a serious shortage of Engineer Officers in the near future and there is no method that I can see of meeting this shortage except the step I now propose.”<sup>112</sup> The

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<sup>110</sup> PRO, ADM 116/3486, Requirements of Officers for 1920, April 1914.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8366/13, Promotion of Engine Room Artificers to Commissioned Rank, 1914; Memorandum by Second Sea Lord, August 1913.

result was a series of different classes of officer, each with various types of experience and training.

By 1912-13, the expansion of the fleet and the heavy demands for officers for the new Dominion navies, the Royal Naval Air Service (R.N.A.S.) and the submarine service, coupled with the increased needs of the dreadnought battle fleet, left the Admiralty critically short of executive officers. Further, the Director of Naval Ordnance had issued manning requirements for the 1912 construction programme.<sup>113</sup> The R.N.A.S. alone was to account for nine commanders and 160 lieutenants by 1920. Projections on the strength of the officer corps for 1920 called for no fewer than 3073 lieutenants (with at least 240 allocated to [E] duties), nearly double the figure from a decade earlier and half again the authorized figure for 1913. Even with the projected addition of ninety lieutenants from the R.N.R., eighty Special Entry cadets, and 185 promoted through the mate scheme, the service was still destined to be short over 500 fully qualified lieutenants.<sup>114</sup> As Admiral Bridge commented:

Now we are getting to a set of conditions that requires serious consideration where education is being discussed; and it is this: that this is the first attempt that has ever been made anywhere to maintain in a period of prolonged peace a naval force on a war footing. It is the first attempt. We have absolutely no experience to guide us.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> PRO, ADM 116/881, Duff Report, 1913. "The large increases in the requirements of lieutenants is due principally to the fact that the complements of ships of the Queen Elizabeth class and later are based on the requirements given in the provisional Quarter Bill supplied by the DNO, which shows an increase in Lieutenants from five to ten per ship."

<sup>114</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8370/65, Memorandum on Officer Requirements.

<sup>115</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1288, Custance Committee Report 1912, testimony of Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, 11 April 1912.



As the Table 4.1 demonstrates, even with a maximum effort with existing infrastructure, the Navy was going to be left seriously short of junior officers.

**Table 4.1 Projected Shortages of Executive Officers**

**Table 4.1A Projected Officer Requirements**

Rank	1916	1918	1920
Commanders	436	444	458
Lieutenants	2289	2406	2523
Officers required for dominion service	50	70	100
Sub Lieutenants	393	389	411

**Table 4.1B Projected Resources of Lieutenants**

	1916	1918	1920
Old Scheme	1600	1450	1150
New Scheme	500	760	1250
Minus Officers for (E) duties	-40	-60	-120
Totals	2060	2150	2280

**Table 4.1C Projected Shortfalls**

Date	1916	1918	1920
Requirements (Lts)	2339	2476	2623
Resources	2060	2150	2280
Projected Shortage of Sub Lt's	-50	-40	-60
Deficit	329	326	343

Source: PRO, ADM 1/8363, Memorandum by C. Walker, 15 August 1912.

Even with Osborne and Dartmouth operating at maximum capacity, the gap between supply and demand was becoming greater. In response, the Admiralty was forced to resort to expedients. First, it sought more R.N.R. officers to serve in the regular forces. Second, it decided to exploit the same sources of recruits as the Army and the Marines by taking boys who had just completed public school.<sup>116</sup> These candidates were to enter at the age of seventeen or eighteen and go through crash training at the former

<sup>116</sup> As early as 1875, such a system had been examined and rejected. *BPP*, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into the System of Training Naval Cadets on Board H.M.S. *Britannia*," vol. XV, C. 1154 (1875), 360.

Royal Naval Engineering College at Keyham to prepare them to take a commission in two and a half years. These future officers were to have the same career prospects as those passing through Osborne and Dartmouth.<sup>117</sup> Although this enabled the selection of another group of young gentlemen, there were drawbacks.<sup>118</sup>

The assertion of the equality of status of Special Entry cadets with their Osborne comrades presented difficulties. Firstly, it undercut all the assumptions regarding the value of the Selborne Scheme. Special Entry cadets did not receive the calibre of engineering and scientific training that their regular entry contemporaries did and yet they were to have the same opportunities. This further damaged the prestige of engineering as a specialization and made those officers inclined toward technical subjects suspicious of the Admiralty's intentions about their freedom to revert to deck duties. Further, it also led parents to question the wisdom of entering their sons into a restrictive educational system through Osborne and Dartmouth if the few prizes were apparently to be snatched out of their sons' mouths by public school entrants at a later age. One concerned parent wrote in a letter to the editor of *The Times*:

Surely the questions for parents to decide are the following. If schoolboys turned into the Service at 17 years of age make as good naval officers as boys trained at Osborne and Dartmouth from 13 years of age, what is the advantage of Osborne and Dartmouth? If they do not make as good officers, what is the advantage to the schoolboys or the Service? Is the experiment to be tried at the risk to the parents, the Osborne boys, the schoolboys, or the Service? It must

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<sup>117</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1213, Regulations for Special Entry Cadets, 1913.

<sup>118</sup> Duke of Montrose, "The Navy and the Public Schools," *RUSI*, LXXI No. 484 (1926), 749. Admiral Sir Richard Phillimore argued after the presentation of the Duke's paper that Special Entry was beneficial since "[t]he Admiralty can keep their hand on the throttle."

be to one of the four. Let these questions be clearly faced before the parents decide.<sup>119</sup>

Another problem of the Special Entry scheme was that it did not supply the service with the anticipated numbers. For instance, of the sixty cadets expected in the 1914 batch, the Admiralty obtained only thirty-one.<sup>120</sup> Public school headmasters seemed reluctant to place much emphasis on recruitment for the Navy since the public schools were widely perceived that they would merely be pulling the Navy's chestnuts out of the fire and consigning their boys to becoming inferior types of officers. Further, some officers argued, the inducting lower-deck boys into Keyham College along with the Special Entry boys, would further hamper efforts to recruit from the higher class. Captain Mansell, the commander of Keyham, argued that the use of the College to train both Special Entry and lower-deck candidates would act as a brake on the recruitment of public school boys. "I am sure if the Special Entry Scheme were more widely known, and the idea that its [sic] a sort of scran bag eliminated, it would attract the right boys – it certainly can't stand any handicap at present." Officers such as Mansell also expressed concern regarding the social conditioning of future deck officers:

This College is in the middle of a town—the youngsters are only allowed into the town on Saturday afternoon and Sunday— they are 18 years old, and one of our difficulties has been to stop their going about with girls not of their own class—we have practically no cases of it now, but should the Lower Deck Boys come, the ground is cut from under our feet, if the Special Entry Cadet says the girl was introduced by the Lower Deck Cadet.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> "Public Schools and the Navy," *The Times*, 10 January 1914. This also reopened the debate over the ideal age of entry of officers, see "The Age of Entry of Naval Cadets," *The Times*, 20 January 1914.

<sup>120</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1734, Captain Mansell to Captain J.C. Ley, DTSD, 24 January 1918.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

The most difficult of the proposed solutions was to offer lower-deck commissions. Not only was it difficult to get executive officers to accept such entrants but also there was considerable disagreement among the ratings about how the system should function. For instance, long-serving warrant officers argued that the best method was for them to receive lieutenancies.<sup>122</sup> By virtue of long service and distinguished conduct, they regarded themselves as the most deserving candidates for commissioned rank. With the development of regular career paths for lower-deck personnel in the form of warrant rank, there was little opportunity for advancement once a man at reached that position.<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, Lionel Yexley argued that for an ex-lower-deck officer to gain advancement beyond lieutenant it was imperative that sailors be offered a regular route for commissions at a young age.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, *The Fleet* argued that promotions granted to senior warrant officers were insults, since these individuals still performed the duties of a warrant officer despite their exalted rank.<sup>125</sup> Generally speaking, regular line officers were more comfortable with advancing older warrant officers for a number of interconnected reasons. First, these men were no threat to their own advancement. The last thing executive officers wanted was competition in the race against the age limits in

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<sup>122</sup> See, Henry Capper, *Aft From the Hawsehole: Sixty-Two Years of Sailors' Evolution* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927), Capper had been raised from the lower deck and was the founder of the *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal*.

<sup>123</sup> "Naval Efficiency," *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal*, XV (March 1902), 35.

<sup>124</sup> "Promotion from the Ranks – II," *The Fleet*, III, No. 26 (June 1907), 192-193.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

the various ranks.<sup>126</sup> Nor did such officers generally fill the wardrooms of sea-going vessels, as they were largely kept out of the mainstream and were posted to reserve and dockyard billets to wind up their time on the active list before mandatory retirement. Lastly, long-serving warrant officers would be experienced in the exercise of command and would be discouraged by a plan that would not let them exercise it.<sup>127</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, commissions were available, albeit rarely, for long and distinguished service or for distinguished conduct.

The system was structured so that ex-lower-deck officers, like their R.N.R. colleagues, would stand virtually no chance of promotion beyond Lieutenant Commander. The first promotions of such officers in 1913 were designed to give the appearance of promotion by merit. Lieutenant Thomas Lyne was advanced to Commander on the direct intervention of the First Lord: “the road is open for all who are worthy to tread it.”<sup>128</sup> Ratings presenting themselves for commissions had to serve for seven years, a rule that was not relaxed until after the war.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> C.S. Forester, *Brown on Resolution* (London: John Lane, 1929), 68.

<sup>127</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1734, Goodenough Committee on Training, dissenting report of H.W. Richmond, March 1918. “But to take a boy wholly untried, – except by exam in elementary mathematics and a general appearance of smartness, – would appear to me no compliment to the lower deck, on which he will hardly have served at all, no reward for good services, and one wholly disproved by the experience of all fighting organisations with which I am acquainted, and by the efficacy of exams as a means of testing fitness to perform a certain duty.”

<sup>128</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/13, Churchill to Second Sea Lord, 1 September 1912; see also, Thomas Lyne, *Something About a Sailor: From Sailor Boy to Admiral* (London: Jarrold, 1940); PRO, ADM 1/8687/179 where a special Order in Council was obtained to promote Lyne to Rear Admiral despite not having put in his qualifying sea time.

<sup>129</sup> BPP, “Statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty Explanatory of the Navy Estimates, 1920-21,” vol. XXVIII, Cmd. 619 (1920), 667.

One of the chief difficulties besides the issue of social class was pay. By taking up a commission, a warrant officer might have to take an effective pay cut. Although his pay would be higher in absolute terms, the increased expenses associated with a commission could impose considerable hardship. One such officer complained at the close of the war that:

As a married officer with a wife and four children and with the prospect of loss of children's allowance at the end of this year I would submit that 17/- per day is totally inadequate to maintain a position of a Lieutenant R.N. on board and on shore. My reasons for this statement is [sic] that after deducting compulsory charges on board to the extent of between £6 and £7 per month minimum, it leaves but a small amount to maintain a wife and educate and clothe four children in accordance with my position as a Lieutenant.”<sup>130</sup>

Further, any increase in pay or allowances for ex-lower-deck officers would excite the jealousy of regular junior officers who were in many cases no better off and had not received such financial assistance. One officer commented in a letter to Captain Herbert Richmond:

The present lower deck Lieutenant was called into existence by a much lauded if not laudable desire for improved social status. When he gets it, what does he do? He pleads the expense of his new position and asks for lodging and provision money to live out in the sphere into which he cried to be called.<sup>131</sup>

In the crisis years of 1913-1914, Churchill engaged in a running battle with the Treasury to reduce the education fees at Osborne and Dartmouth and to increase the level of support for subordinate officers. This was intended to reduce the financial burdens on

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<sup>130</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8592/129, Lieutenant Ernest Ovenden to Admiralty, 12 August 1919.

<sup>131</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), H.W. Richmond Papers (RIC) 7/4, Commander Harrison-Smith to Richmond, 8 August 1912.

parents that had increased with the advent of the Selborne Scheme. At the conclusion of an officer's training, parents would have shelled out nearly £600 for training fees, allowances, outfits and uniforms.<sup>132</sup>

As early as September 1911, the Admiralty was pressuring the Treasury to widen its authority to increase the number of cadets eligible for reduced fees. Discretionary authority already existed to permit the sons of officers to pay £40 per year compared to the regular £75. Citing the fact that attempts to establish private scholarships had failed and that only twenty-seven percent of applicants were eligible for reduced fees, the Treasury predictably refused to budge.<sup>133</sup> In the spring of 1913, the Parliamentary Secretary, Dr. Macnamara, concluded that the situation was becoming grave in regard to the qualifications of candidates coming forward for selection for Osborne. This time the Admiralty wished not to have discretionary reductions at its disposal but to offer every cadet substantially reduced fees.<sup>134</sup>

This reached the point where the First Lord harassed the Treasury based on the experience of Midshipman E.L.B. Damant, whose stepfather was no longer able to support him financially. Citing several other examples, Churchill appealed to the Treasury that the Admiralty be permitted a discretionary fund to support a selected group of officers to ensure their retention. In the case of Damant, who had passed out of Dartmouth at the top of his class, it would cost nearly £1200 to replace him while his

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<sup>132</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8402/422, Statement by Accountant-General, 1914.

<sup>133</sup> PRO, T 1/11326, Admiralty to Treasury, 22 September 1911.

<sup>134</sup> PRO, T 1/11948, Admiralty to Treasury, 22 April 1913.



support until he reached commissioned rank would cost but £250 at the most. Churchill argued:

...[A]nd this at a time when we are straining every nerve to find officers for the Navy, and to make good the serious shortage with which we are faced. And this is not all; we shall be compelled further to enter two Naval Cadets to fill their places, and to ask the taxpayer to contribute a further sum of £1,000 to train them.”<sup>135</sup>

The Treasury contended, however, that bailing out subordinate officers who could no longer meet the costs associated with entering the naval service would establish a bad precedent, not only for the navy but also for the civil service and the army.

The increased tempo of operations and the greedy demands of the fleet for more officers often entailed revisions to the training programmes, especially to meet the demand for specialists, such as in signals. Demands for such training and their importance to the careers of officers also had a severe impact on the assignment of officers to billets. A report in 1913 demonstrated that the dearth of officers dangerously decreased the time served by officers filling assigned positions. Pointing out that in some cases officers were serving mere months at sea, Churchill argued that “[t]his incessant movement would be appropriate to a kaleidoscope, to the casual ward of a work house, to a very large American hotel in the height of the seasons. It must be fatal to the development of a fighting organisation.”<sup>136</sup> Further, reductions were made in the length of commissions to ameliorate shortages of personnel (see Table 4.2).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8402/422, First Lord to Chancellor of the Exchequer, 6 July 1914.

<sup>136</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8374/96, Minute by Churchill, 30 July 1912.

<sup>137</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/29, Churchill to Battenberg, 2 February 1914.

**Table 4.2 Average Time in Billet of a Sample of Officers Changing Appointments in 1913**

No. of Officers	Rank	Time in Billet
10	Captain	1 yr
15	Commander	1 yr, 5 mths
99	Lieutenant	1 yr 2 ½ mths
35	Sub-Lieutenant	7 ½ mths

*Source:* CCAC, CHAR 13/29, Churchill to Battenberg, 2 February 1914.

Charles Beresford in the Commons in 1898 pointed out that there were only thirty-eight lieutenants on half pay available for recall.

It shows that the country is so short of Lieutenants that they are obliged to employ every one of them. It is a very bad thing for the Service that a Lieutenant should always be on board ship, and always employed, without having some opportunity of getting a knowledge of the world. It is very necessary that he should have some acquaintance with political affairs, both at home and abroad, for he may be sent to a foreign station, where a gun boat will settle a matter involving peace and war. There, I think, Lieutenants ought to have a great deal more liberty than they are allowed in the interests of the Service.”<sup>138</sup>

In 1904, Admiral Sir Edmund Fremantle lamented that few lieutenants were on half pay. He criticized the system but wished greater liberty for officers to take up other interests.<sup>139</sup> Sir Charles Walker recalled in his memoirs that in 1904, when he was assistant to the Second Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Archibald Douglas, he had only four lieutenants available after he had completed the roster of officers: one was on permanent half pay and the other three were on foreign service leave. This difficulty was

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<sup>138</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. LV (1898), col. 277.

<sup>139</sup> Fremantle, *The Navy As I Have Known It*, 459.

compounded by the fact that all large ships were supplied with one lieutenant R.N.R. in lieu of a regular officer. Furthermore, only ships with midshipmen in the gunroom were supplied with sub-lieutenants, which increased the strain in other vessels (see Table 4.3).<sup>140</sup>

**Table 4.3 Officers Employed, 31 December 1901**

	Captain	Comman der	Lieuten ant	Supplementary Lieutenants (RNR)	Sub- Lieutenants	Midship men	Total
Serving in ships	101	145	718	112	154	679	1909
Shore duty	54	116	192	18	-	-	380
On passage	3	2	26	2	-	-	33
At college	12	10	73	-	190	-	285
Govt Service	-	2	4	-	-	-	6
Leave and unemployed	29	29	23	1	7	15	104
Not wishing employment	5	5	35	1	3	11	60
Total	204	309	1071	134	354	705	2777

Source: Great Britain, Parliament, House of Lords, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. CIII, Appendix I, Statement Explanatory of Navy Estimates, 1902-1903.

When D.N.I. in 1900, Louis Battenberg was so deeply concerned about the shortage of executive officers in the event of war that he recommended that the Admiralty look to former officers who had for various reasons resigned their commissions. Under the scheme put forward by a special Order-in-Council, some twenty-five officers regained their commissions. The list of resigned officers was closely scrutinized to ensure that no one who had resigned for misconduct or “to suit their own conveniences or from other selfish motives” would be reinstated.<sup>141</sup> At least one reinstated officer, Alfred Carleton,

<sup>140</sup> Walker, *Thirty-Six Years at the Admiralty*, 27.

<sup>141</sup> PRO, ADM 116/120 Emergency Officers Scheme, 1900-1902.

was grateful for the chance to make a contribution to the service. "I wish to add my respectful thanks to Their Lordships for this opportunity of again serving in the Royal Navy. Nothing but circumstance of an imperative nature would have made me resign my Commission and I did so with great regret."<sup>142</sup> Yet there was still a reluctance to reinstate active commissions for officers who had resigned.

With the foundation of the Naval Staff system just prior to the war, it became imperative to train staff officers specifically to fulfil that function, not just in the Admiralty but also in the operational commands ashore and afloat. Attempts to institute effective staff training for every deck officer foundered on the reality of officer shortages. As Battenberg noted in the spring of 1914, "I fear the dearth of Officers will only permit of a very small beginning to be made in short courses for Lieutenants."<sup>143</sup>

Also, accomplished officers were frequently withdrawn from the War Course to take up active commands.<sup>144</sup> Even insofar as reading and considering wider policy, officers were constrained by the increased pace of activity and the conflicting demands on their time, as Captain William Kennedy put forward upon receiving an invitation to subscribe to *The Naval Review*:

I am ever so sorry not to have replied to your note about the *Naval Review* before this – The fact is I have been considering the matter & the conclusion I have come to is that officers on the active list & employed already have all their time taken up with the work & study that there is little time for anything further – I know I find myself trying hard to keep pace with their reading I have to do & yet to dive

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<sup>142</sup> PRO, ADM 116/120 Emergency Officers Scheme, 1900-1902; Alfred Carleton to Admiralty, 12 July 1901.

<sup>143</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/118, Minute by Battenberg, 9 May 1914.

<sup>144</sup> PRO, ADM 203/100, Records of War College, 1901-1914.

into history, so I am afraid I cannot go in for the *Review*, not that we have not an enormous amount to learn but the trouble is we have only 24 hours in the day—.<sup>145</sup>

The apparent shortage of competent watch-keeping officers forced the Admiralty to make difficult decisions about the entry and training of executive commissioned officers. This shortage of critical personnel prior to the First World War had a significant impact on policy. In the first place, the rapid expansion of the Navy ensured the promotion of many more officers to positions of responsibility than would have otherwise occurred. As early as 1904, Admiral Sir John Fisher complained about the lack of selection of officers in the upper ranks.

Mr Childers was our Attila! He was the “scourge” of the Navy in many ways, but most of all by his disastrous and frightfully costly retirement schemes. *The secret of efficiency lies in large lists of Officers!* You have then a large field of selection, and a great flow of promotion, and also no Officer considers it a stigma to be passed over in company with forty others, and so not to pose as a solitary monument of ineptitude as he appears at present to himself and his friends when passed over with the present small lists of Flag Officers.<sup>146</sup>

Perhaps the justifiable lack of confidence in the senior officers of the Grand Fleet led Admiral Sir John Jellicoe during the Great War to impose strict centralized control in the form of the Grand Fleet Battle Orders. Evidence also demonstrates that the competence of the senior ranks was in doubt, a condition that caused immense frustration and

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<sup>145</sup> Royal Naval Museum, Naval Review Papers, Captain William Kennedy to Admiral W.H. Henderson, 30 April 1913.

<sup>146</sup> PRO, ADM 7/993, Naval Necessities, vol. I, 1904, 26.

embarrassment to the officer corps.<sup>147</sup> This officer shortage also reached the point where the Admiralty could not find a suitable officer on the active list to send to Greece to assist the development of its navy.<sup>148</sup> This dissatisfaction with the quality of candidates began to alarm Admiralty leadership seriously.<sup>149</sup>

Besides the availability of finance and the limitations of technology and shipyard capacity, the ability of the Admiralty to maintain the burgeoning fleet was also constrained by the lack of executive officers. Moreover, the lack of this crucial resource, particularly in the junior ranks, forced the Navy to experiment with several different pathways to the wardroom. In the process it was also forced to reopen the unwritten contract that bound the executive officer to the state.

## Conclusion

In the years before 1914, the executive officer corps experienced increasing constraints to the exercise of their rights and privileges. The polite fiction of independence was pitilessly stripped away while officers' financial affairs became more pressing. The culture of command underwent dramatic revision as the scope for individual initiative retracted. Finally, the "traditional" supply withered in the surge of naval expansion. This directly impinged on the status of the officer corps because the traditional assertion that seamen were made from childhood was eroded as Special Entry entrants took their place beside comrades from Osborne. Officers from the lower deck threatened the basis of the

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<sup>147</sup> For an example, see, Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996).

<sup>148</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/22B, Churchill to First Sea Lord, 27 May 1913.

<sup>149</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1288 Pt. 11, Memorandum on Custance Report by Churchill, 20 June 1913.

exclusiveness of the quarterdeck despite mechanisms put in place to prevent competition for promotion. Finally, the pressure of numbers and the need to regulate promotion effectively destroyed what Admiral Sir George Mundy described as “[t]he first of all advantages, certainly, and the greatest,” promotion to flag rank on the basis of seniority.<sup>150</sup> Advancement to the highest ranks in the service, though still technically by seniority, became in reality based on selection. Further, the shortage of officers and the attempts to shore up the exclusivity of *Britannia*- and Osborne-trained cadets also increased workload, placed a further strain on officer resources, and contributed to the inability to train sufficient number of men fit to serve as command staff officers.

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<sup>150</sup> *BPP*, “Report from the Select Committee on Navy Promotion and Retirement,” vol. X, No. 501 (1863), 173.



## Chapter V

### “Oh, These Magicians and Necromancers, They are Ruining Us”<sup>1</sup> The Clash of Sailors and Engineers

That the Navy is “going to the dogs” has been a favourite thesis from the days of Drake and Frobisher; and this canine goal never seemed nearer of attainment than when steam and iron came to stay in the fleet, and wrested from the old sea-dogs what they had come to regard as their own particular heritage.<sup>2</sup>

Our sails are gone, and instead we have now  
A screw sticking out on each quarter;  
Grape, canister, chain, we have none of these shot,  
But “Maxims” will add to the slaughter.  
And better than all we have moved with the times  
From foc’sle to ward-room this ranges,  
Our bluejackets hearts are of steel, not of oak,  
They’ve followed the ships in their changes.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most widespread phenomena of the late nineteenth century was the development of professional engineering. As a result of the increasing complexity of industrial economies and the need to limit transaction costs, standardization of certain functions in both the state and developing corporate bureaucracies depended in part on the creation of organizations that granted qualifications to persons working in specific fields.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H.J. Woodward, “The Atrophy of the Lieutenant,” *Naval Review*, II (1914), 42; also quoted in National Maritime Museum (NMM), K.G.B. Dewar Papers (DEW) 33/, Dewar to Richmond, 8 August 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Shore, “A Fin-de-Siècle Tragedy: or, The Death and Burial of Seamanship,” *United Service Magazine*, XXIII (1901), 573.

<sup>3</sup> “Navy Changes,” *United Service Magazine*, IX (1894), 104.

<sup>4</sup> See Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977); and Chandler, “The Growth of the Transnational Industrial Firm in the United States and the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis,” *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., XXXIII, No. 3 (August 1980), 396-410; and Robert A. Buchanan, *The Engineers: A History of the Engineering Profession in Britain, 1750-1914* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1989).

One of the most important of these groups was professional engineering, which not only elevated the social and economic position of specialists but also served the public good.<sup>5</sup> In regard to engineering, the benefits seemed obvious, since investors and the general public could be assured of the safety of transport at limited costs associated with the former “trial and error” methods.<sup>6</sup> In the process of educating, cajoling or otherwise convincing the general public of their expertise, engineers saw it a matter of course that other methods of working or practitioners of the craft outside the professional circle must be either attacked or subjected to their authority. In their bid to assert their power, professional engineers fought on two fronts: first, to raise the social status of their members and second, to attempt to suppress those who had difficulty with their “hitches.”<sup>7</sup>

Given the revolution in naval affairs, it seemed entirely logical for professional engineering to make great headway into the naval service. Indeed, by the 1840s engineers were already gaining Royal Navy commissions, albeit in the Civil Branch. By the end of the century, with the massive amounts of money being spent on the Navy and its enormous popularity as an institution, and with naval defence being the most visible “public good” provided by the state, naval engineers argued that in a steam-powered navy

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<sup>5</sup> J.D. Churchill, “Marine Engine Governors, and the Benefits derived from Them,” *Transactions of the Institute of Marine Engineers (TIME)*, I (1889), 5.

<sup>6</sup> As early as 1839, there was considerable concern over the safety of steam navigation. See Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, “Report on Steam Vessel Accidents,” vol. XLVII, No. 279 (1839), 14, testimony of Mr. Gibson. “Steam navigation has advanced more rapidly than men of experience and knowledge of machinery have been found to conduct it; hence we often find, in river packets in part, men advanced to the post of engineer who are mere automatons, ignorant of the first principles of the machine over which they preside, and who, in case of any derangement, do, from ignorance of the result, the very thing which they ought to have avoided, thereby creating, rather than averting danger, or accident.”

<sup>7</sup> J. MacFarlane Gray, “Annual General Meeting: Remarks by the Vice-President of the Institute,” *TIME*, II (1890-1891), 20.

they should have recognition of their specialized skills. It is here, however, that the engineering branch encountered another evolving profession that had successfully commanded and managed naval defence for nearly two centuries, the executive officer corps. Like any group with a vested interest, this one was not likely to surrender ground easily, particularly when it was under pressure from various other sources discussed in the last chapter.

One of the first explanations for the failure to recognize the importance and status of professional engineers is the argument that British social and cultural values placed more importance on the “gentlemanly ideal” in which obtaining a living from financial services or landowning was deemed one of the most respectable ways.<sup>8</sup> Occupations associated with physical labour, on the other hand, were denigrated.<sup>9</sup> The British landed establishment and their associates in the civil service and the armed forces sought to uphold these values by marginalizing those responsible for the management of “unclean” things. Further, this attitude has been conflated into explanations for British economic decline after 1945. For instance, Corelli Barnett in his *Audit of War* explained how the cultural values that elevated the liberal arts over the industrial sciences weakened the

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Sked, *Britain's Decline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); and P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Longmans, 2001), 43-50.

<sup>9</sup> T.W. Fish, “The Status of Engineers of the Mercantile Marine,” *TIME*, V (1893-1894), 36-37, comments by J. Milne. “Of course an Engineer on board ship has to get very dirty, and you know very well that in the world dirt never commands respect. If, for instance, after going down into the bilges, or dealing with a warm bearing, an Engineer comes on deck, the passengers will not care to come near him; but it is not because they do not respect him, for after he has changed they are very glad to come round and have a chat with him.” See also, M. Loane, “Class Hatred,” *The Spectator*, 22 April 1911, “One reason why we are too ready to believe in class-hatred is because we think that, as the poor are constantly engaged in a struggle with hard material conditions, they are inevitably materialistic in their views.” For an interesting view of the nature of “cleanliness” in Victorian Britain, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

basis of British claims to global influence.<sup>10</sup> Other historians have attempted to backdate this problem to 1870, by which time it had become apparent that Britain was losing ground to its American and German rivals.<sup>11</sup>

Lord Melville, in a letter to the Colonial Office, explained that he also frequently based this argument on an infamous 1828 statement

regretted the inability of My Lords Commissioners to comply with the request of the Colonial Department, as they felt it their bounden duty to discourage to the utmost of their ability the employment of steam vessels, as they considered that the introduction of steam was calculated to strike a fatal blow at the Naval Supremacy of the Empire.<sup>12</sup>

Other examples are also cited, such as a decision in 1829 by the Royal Yacht Squadron to deny membership to gentlemen who owned steamboats.<sup>13</sup> Superficial analysis would seem to indicate that there was a powerful prejudice against steam power and, by extension, to the men who drove and maintained that machinery.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation does not take into account the expense of steam machinery and its supporting

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<sup>10</sup> Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion & Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Martin Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 157-166; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 224-232.

<sup>12</sup> John Briggs, *Naval Administrations, 1827-1892* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1897), 9; also quoted in Geoffrey Penn, *Up Funnel, Down Screw! The Story of the Naval Engineer* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1955), 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> K.T. Rowland, *Steam at Sea: A History of Steam Navigation* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 65-66.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, this argument is subject to dispute as cases of deep and abiding interest in steam propulsion by line officers are readily found. See *The Times*, 26 January 1903, Rear Admiral Victor Montague failed to see the difference between specialist officers in gunnery and those in engineering. See also *The Times*, 9 January 1903, where an anonymous naval officer expressed the same sentiments; and *The Times*, 27 January 1903, Admiral Sir Thomas Ward. Indeed, as early as 1851, the Admiralty issued instructions that line officers should be compelled to study aspects of marine engineering. John Beeler (ed.), *The Milne Papers: The Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Alexander Milne* (2 vols., London: Navy Records Society, 2004), I, 300-303.

infrastructure and fails to understand the limitations of steam power until the last decades of the century. Early steam engines were grossly inefficient, and a Navy with global commitments could not count on obtaining a reliable and inexpensive supply of coal abroad. Moreover, the use of warships would be affected by limited range, and the space required for early machinery would dramatically alter the design and manning of vessels and limit their utility.<sup>15</sup> Further, all of this cost money that the Navy was unlikely to be able to justify to Parliament. Fortunately, recent work by Andrew Lambert, John Beeler and David K. Brown has questioned the foregoing assumptions and demonstrated that the Royal Navy was far more favourable toward innovation than has previously been thought.<sup>16</sup>

Most officers were realistic in their assessment that steam, hydraulic and electrical machinery were part of their working environment and were crucial to the Navy's future. In disposing of the argument that a sense of danger and enterprise were unique to sail training and could not be experienced by those trained in steam, Captain Charles Penrose Fitzgerald wrote derisively in 1887 that:

Intricate steam tactics at high speed, and in very close order, ought to strengthen the nerves of our Officers; and as to the men, they could be given so many hours a day to fiddle with the live heads of Whitehead torpedoes with the detonators in; or they could be set to work to hammer sensitive fuzes into filled shell. At any rate I feel sure that the

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as late as 1887, Charles Fitzgerald, a strong advocate of steam engineering, argued for the retention of rigged vessels on distant stations. See C.C.P. Fitzgerald, "Mastless Ships of War," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XXXI (1887), 116.

<sup>16</sup> D.K. Brown, *From Warrior to Dreadnought: Warship Development, 1860-1905* (London: Chatham, 2002); John Beeler, *The Birth of the Battleship: British Capital Ship Design, 1870-1881* (London: Chatham, 2001); and Andrew Lambert, "Responding to the Nineteenth Century: The Royal Navy and the Introduction of the Screw Propeller," *History of Technology*, XXI (1999), 1-28.

staffs of the *Excellent* and *Vernon* will find no difficulty in suggesting dangerous employment of some sort, if that is all that is required.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, formerly Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, stated in 1900 “[a]ll my commands have been in masted ships, I have loved the sea, and I am devoted to sail drill and sailing-ships. But the conviction has forced itself upon me—much against my will—that masts and sails are gone forever. The world goes round; and it will go round: you cannot stop it.”<sup>18</sup> Also, promotion criteria had changed significantly by the turn of the century so that officers specializing in gunnery or torpedo work had a significant advantage in the race for promotion and billets. These specialist branches were in reality a form of engineering. A perusal of the appendices of the histories of the gunnery and torpedo schools demonstrates that a high proportion of technical specialists reached the highest ranks in the service.<sup>19</sup> For instance, of the nine officers who passed through the torpedo course in 1887, at least five became admirals on the active list, a much higher proportion than of ordinary lieutenants who became commanders.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Fitzgerald, “Mastless Ships of War,” 121; *Excellent* and *Vernon* were respectively the Royal Navy’s gunnery and torpedo schools located at Portsmouth.

<sup>18</sup> James R. Thursfield, “The Training of Seamen,” *RUSI*, XLIV (September 1900), 988, comments by Culme-Seymour.

<sup>19</sup> E.N. Poland, *The Torpedomen: H.M.S. Vernon’s Story, 1872-1986* (London: E.N. Poland, 1986), 380-392; and Robert Oliver, *H.M.S. Excellent, 1830-1930* (Portsmouth: Charpentier, 1930), appendix I.

<sup>20</sup> Poland, *Torpedomen*, 381; officers passing this course in 1887 included Charles Madden who became 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of the Grand Fleet and a future First Sea Lord, Alexander Duff headed the Anti-Submarine Division of the Naval Staff, Herbert Heath commanded a Battle Squadron in the Grand Fleet and Reginald Bacon was Flag Officer, Dover during the war.

If, therefore, the Admiralty and the Navy as a whole did not have ingrained prejudices against engineering, what was behind the bitter reaction of many executive officers against the extension of the rights and privileges of engineer officers at the turn of the century? Executive officers had little difficulty with the concept of engineering but did have a problem with the profession itself. The engineering branch comprised an increasing proportion of total naval personnel, and commissioned engineer officers began to assert greater control over their own sphere with the aid of allies such as the Institute of Marine Engineers.<sup>21</sup> The status and working conditions of professional engineers was of deep concern to such organizations, particularly as they related to the merchant service. Since engineers and merchant officers could often be Royal Naval Reserve (R.N.R.) officers, professional engineers considered it imperative to put pressure on the Admiralty to improve their status because the concept of command and the skills of seamanship were strongest among the Navy's deck officers. Further, the prestige of the ship's captain and the command function were highest in the Royal Navy, and the capacity to negotiate professional space and responsibility for engineers would provide enormous leverage in dealing not only with shipowners but also with deck officers in merchant vessels.<sup>22</sup> As well, the Admiralty was a public department, and thus were established avenues to increase the status of engineering through political agitation and the efforts of the professional and public press. Several engineers, including Sir Edward Reed, were able to

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, a deputation of representatives of several engineering institutions met with the Earl of Selborne, the First Lord of the Admiralty, in 1901 to secure assurances that the status of naval engineers would be addressed.

<sup>22</sup> Tony Lane, *Grey Dawn Breaking: British Merchant Seafarers in the late Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 161-162. Lane discusses this tendency for merchant officers to affect the attitudes of regular R.N. officers in carrying out their duties.



enter politics and subject the Admiralty to questions and criticisms that could not be easily ignored.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, many of the professional marine engineers had trained at the Navy's establishments at Keyham and Greenwich Colleges, and the Admiralty therefore was an important contributor to the professionalization of marine engineers.

**Table 5.1: Personnel in the Royal Navy, 1838-1898**

Date	Executive	Engineering	Royal Marines	Other	Total
1838	30,809	3,831	14,919	5,559	55,138
Percent	56	7	27	10	
1868	31,981	5,391	15,970	11,052	64,394
Percent	49.7	8.4	25	17.2	
1878	27,911	5,627	13,727	8,508	55,773
Percent	50	10.1	24.6	15.3	
1888	28,232	8,536	12,845	8,914	58,529
Percent	48.2	14.6	22	15.2	
1898	44,336	22,289	17,099	11,816	95,540
Percent	46.4	23.3	17.9	12.4	

*Notes:* Percentages do not always equal 100 due to rounding. This return was used as the starting point for further agitation for the increased status and prospects of engineers; see D.B. Morison, "The British Naval Engineer: His Present Position and Influence on Our Sea Power," *Transactions of the Institute of Marine Engineers (TIME)*, XII (1900-1901), 7.

*Source:* BPP, "Navy Return of Numbers Borne," vol. LVI, No. 288 (1898), 637.

Naval officers began to react strongly against engineering when that profession threatened the overarching authority of deck officers. As warships became more complex and more reliant on machinery, the demand for technical personnel increased. Further, by

<sup>23</sup> BPP, "Report from the Select Committee on Navy Estimates," vol. XII, No. 142 (1888), 582. During the life of this committee Sir Edward Reed grilled Admiral Sir Anthony Hoskins: "But, as representatives of the constituencies of this country who have to pay these present charges and to face the contingent ones, we are obliged to ask ourselves whether a ship that is worked by steam from one end to the other in all her details can do with one engineer officer, and yet requires five officers of another class to keep watch and navigate her?"

the late 1860s steam was gradually superseding wind as the prime motive power of the fleet. As Table 5.1 demonstrates above, the growth in the Engineer Branch both in absolute numbers and share of total strength was dramatic.

This trend accelerated toward 1914 as the *Dreadnought* revolution, the advent of submarines, the increasing engine power required to drive 20,000-ton vessels at high speed, and the growing array of auxiliary appliances increased the size and complexity of engineering departments. For example, the Grand Fleet's battle cruisers required more than a third of the entire crew to be in the engineering department.<sup>24</sup> Further, if prolonged high-speed steaming were to be maintained, seamen ratings had to be taken from deck duties to assist in the trimming and supply of coal to the boilers.<sup>25</sup> With the increased responsibilities and supervisory authority of engineer officers, it seemed illogical, churlish and even snobbish to deny them the necessary authority to perform their functions. Indeed, some engineer officers concluded that the denial of rank and position was a deliberate strategy to keep them in their place. "Because if they permitted the engineer department to grow to its legitimate proportions – proportions corresponding to the multifarious duties which naturally and properly belong to it – it would quickly equal in numbers, if it did not surpass, the sailor element."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Even in battleships, the demands for stoker personnel were heavy. For instance in the case of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's flagship H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, while all ranks in the seaman branch numbered 420, there were over 230 in engineering. James Goldrick, "The Battleship Fleet: The Test of War, 1895-1919," in J.R. Hill (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 309.

<sup>25</sup> See Brian Schofield, "'Jacky' Fisher, H.M.S. *Indomitable* and the Dogger Bank Action: A Personal Memoir," in Gerald Jordan (ed.), *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1945: Essays in Honour of Arthur Marder* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 68. Regarding the difficulty of supplying coal see, D.K. Brown, *The Grand Fleet: Warship Design and Development, 1906-1922* (London: Chatham, 1999), 22; Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 116/996, Douglas Report, 16.

Moreover, some argued that the working conditions and status of engineers had not kept pace with the Navy's growing reliance on machinery. Nor did they reflect the increasingly "scientific" nature of the management of power plants.

This condition of things has to a great extent never been altered. With the march of engineering science, naval engineering has kept good pace, and the "working engineer" has necessarily given place to the highly trained managing engineer, with subordinate mechanics, and hosts of labourers, more or less skilled stokers. Still the old insularity of the department is strong.<sup>27</sup>

As professional engineering became increasingly divided from the "mere engine drivers," there were demands to improve the social stature of engineer officers. Commissioned engineering officers were largely the sons of middle-class professionals who deeply resented being treated as "engine drivers." The Admiralty agreed, and the Cooper Key Committee of 1877 expressed discontent over the quality of students entered in previous years. If the Admiralty, they argued, were to inquire more closely into the antecedents of candidates and impose fees,

it may be expected that a larger proportion of the sons of professional men will be induced to enter as Students. We have received evidence that the indiscriminate admission of lads from the lower ranks of society deters Officers, and other professional men from allowing their sons to compete for these appointments.<sup>28</sup>

To deny that there was class prejudice or that social considerations were important would be idle, since there was still a divide between the social origins of engineering and

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Johnston, "The Doom of the Naval Engineer," *Engineering Magazine*, XXIII (September 1902), 826.

<sup>27</sup> "The Status of Engineers," *The Fleet*, VI (January 1910), 10.

<sup>28</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee to Consider the Best Means of Securing the Highest Mechanical Skill and Scientific Knowledge for HM Navy," vol. XXI, C.4647 (1877), 5.

that of executive officers. For instance, of the 317 engineering students entered into Keyham College between 1897 and 1905, only four were the sons of executive branch officers and only one of those fathers had been promoted beyond lieutenant.<sup>29</sup> Further, there is a considerable amount of contemporary anecdotal evidence that executive officers often put their perceived social inferiors in their place. Fisher, for instance, liked to tell the story of a lieutenant who, when forced to give way to a more senior engineer officer, told the man to keep in mind that “...my ma will never invite your ma for tea.”<sup>30</sup>

The fight for social status was a constant battle that was reflected in popular literature. In a Francis Burton novel the main character, a young engineer from a socially prominent family (his fictional father was the Dean of Exeter cathedral), encountered the rough-and-ready older engineer officer who was frequently drunk, used disgraceful language and was little more than a glorified workman. When invited to dinner at an officers’ mess at Gibraltar, the young engineer experienced social exclusion for the first time when he was informed that the mess did not normally invite engineers. Since this fictional engineer’s brother was in a cavalry regiment and his father was a prominent churchman, however, the Army officers felt an exception could be made in his case.<sup>31</sup> Another, this time non-fictional, engineer reacted bitterly when told in a patronizing fashion that he behaved rather well at a social function ashore: “What did you expect?

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<sup>29</sup> PRO, ADM 7/931, Engineer Students, Parentage, 1909. See Appendix III.

<sup>30</sup> R.S. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (2 vols., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929), I, 186, See also Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought: the Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (3 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), I, 211-212, Fisher to Selborne, 9 August 1901.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Burton, *The Naval Engineer and the Command of the Sea: A Story of Naval Administration* (Manchester: Technical Publishing Co., 1896), 4, 13.

Did you think I should tremble on the edge of my chair, bite the end of my handkerchief, and say, ‘Yes, mum,’ in an awed whisper?”<sup>32</sup> The practice of professional engineering, based upon scientific and mathematical education, was a social escalator, and engineers were exhorted to be worthy of this elevation. As the Vice President of the Institute of Marine Engineering and the inventor of steam steering gear, J. MacFarlane Gray, argued:

If engineers will aim at so conducting themselves that they are never spoken of otherwise as being “quite equal if not superior to the deck officers in their language and behaviour,” and if that pertains to their highly intellectual calling that make themselves masters both of theory and the practice, the time would not be very distant when their importance in steamers would be fully recognised.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, one engineer even contended that without his profession the advances of the last several millennia would have been impossible. He stated “that without him [the engineer] we should have to revert to that stage which may be described as the stone age...”<sup>34</sup> One engineer officer advised his younger colleagues that “[a]ll classes in the Navy, and some out of it, seem to overlook the fact that all cannot be exactly of the same social standing.”<sup>35</sup>

The claims made by engineers had considerable appeal and legitimacy in the eyes of a substantial portion of the British public. Although there were some failures, the spectacular achievements of British engineers in this period, such as the extensive railway network and technical wonders like the Forth Bridge, increased the prestige of the “man

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<sup>32</sup> “Naval Engineers,” *Naval and Military Record*, 5 March 1903, 12.

<sup>33</sup> J. MacFarlane Gray, “Annual General Meeting Address,” *TIME*, II (1890-1891), 20.

<sup>34</sup> W.J. Harding, “The Defence of the Realm from the Mechanical Engineer’s View,” *TIME*, XVIII (1906-1907), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Fleet Engineer, “Social Status in the Navy,” *Naval and Military Record*, 1 January 1903.

of science.” Given the strength of the British shipping industry, which owned half of the world’s merchant tonnage, and British shipyards, which constructed about sixty percent of total world carrying capacity, marine engineering was perceived as particularly vital to maintaining the efficiency and safety that had become hallmarks of the industry. Further, professional groups, such as marine engineers, had a vested interest in asserting the importance of their specialized knowledge and in showing that they were the guardians of knowledge that was critical for the preservation of a ship at sea.

However, with the case of deck officers who were already supposedly competent to ensure safety of navigation, such claims encountered a snag. When called upon to justify referring to engineers as “engine-drivers,” Admiral Sir Anthony Hoskins argued that he used the term

because I think there is a very exaggerated view generally in the mind of the public as to the importance of these duties. The multiplicity of the engines and the duties connected with them, impress the public mind very much when they go aboard one of these vessels. But each engine is a very simple thing in itself generally; and, in fact, I have seen on board a P&O [Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company] steamer a Lascar bring a bottle of oil and lubricate some machinery on deck, and start a lever and hoist the cargo out himself; and he was driving an engine.”<sup>36</sup>

Nor was this attitude exclusive to old line officers, as Fisher himself argued:

believe me, there is not half so much required to be a good engineer as to be a good gunnery or Torpedo Lieutenant. A fellow who can put together all the mechanism of a Whitehead Torpedo and manipulate all the intricacies of modern gun arrangements involving the highest

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<sup>36</sup> *BPP*, “Report of the Select Committee on Navy Estimates,” vol. XII, No. 142 (1888), 583, testimony of Admiral Sir John Hoskins.

practical and technical knowledge will find it simply child's play to manipulate engines and boilers of any ship in the Navy!<sup>37</sup>

At the turn of the century, when the engineer "agitation" was at its peak, the professional competence of the officer class of both the Army and the Navy was being questioned in view of the harsh realities of the South African War. As well, there was a growing anxiety that Britain was losing its competitive edge in markets that the country had traditionally dominated; as this anxiety grew it was deemed imperative by a wide swath of public and official opinion that Britain become a more "efficient" national community.<sup>38</sup> Professional engineers were in a very powerful position to demonstrate that their particular brand of efficiency represented the best chance for national regeneration. The traditional ideal of military leadership and "muddling through" were exposed as bankrupt.

Obviously, the first step to maintain the authority of the executive in relation to subsidiary branches of the service was to doubt the competence of and to denigrate the professional term "engineer." As Hoskins' remark suggests, routine use of the phrase "engine driver" was a convenient technique. Also, there were frequent assertions that engineering was not particularly mysterious compared with the unknowable secrets of the sea. It was rather interesting how one officer described the imparting of this sacred

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<sup>37</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), Bryan Godfrey-Faussett Papers (BGGF) 2/3, Fisher to Godfrey-Faussett, 19 January 1903; Godfrey-Faussett was closely connected to the Prince of Wales and was used as a contact by Fisher to put his views across to the heir to the throne.

<sup>38</sup> G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).



knowledge as if it was some sort of Masonic rite.<sup>39</sup> Other officers, like Gerard Noel, questioned the very basis of the engineering profession:

What is an engineer? He is an ingenuous man who has acquired the power of utilising the forces of Nature, and, by mechanical appliances, bending them to his will. I say that engineering is not a new science. Four thousand years ago one of the greatest engineers the world ever saw built the great pyramid.... The executive of the Navy are all engineers in the sense that the Royal Engineers are engineers.... The executive are engineers in the broad sense of the term. I say that training at sea in masted ships is nothing more nor less than training in engineering.<sup>40</sup>

The systematic attacks on the basis of the authority of professional engineers were a way of subordinating them to the “natural” governors who inhabited the quarterdeck.

The questions that must be answered are what engineers demanded and why many of their concerns were resisted so bitterly by line officers. To understand the first question, however, it is necessary to outline briefly the development of career paths for engineer officers. When steam engines were first installed in wooden hulls, manufacturers sent men who were not strictly naval personnel to manage and maintain the equipment.<sup>41</sup> As steam power gradually became more reliable and efficient, it became imperative that regularized entry and warrant or even commissioned rank should be awarded because of the increasing skill levels required and the fact that the Navy was forced to compete in the

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<sup>39</sup> Thursfield, “Training of Seamen,” 1012-1013, comments by Captain A.C. Corry; see also, NMM, G. Noel Papers 5/13B, Noel to Commodore Atkinson, 27 July 1896. “[T]hese modern vessels do not get enough sea work, and a commissioned ship is much more adopted for the training in gunnery and other drills than for the initiation of young seamen into the secrets of a sea life.”

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 992-993; comments by Gerard Noel. See also, Reginald Custance, “Naval Education: Its Past and Future,” Blackwood’s, CLXXVIII, No. 1080 (October 1805), 445. “The modern war-vessel is as much a ship as was the wooden two-decker, and the *Victory* was as much a machine as is the modern *Edward VII*.”

<sup>41</sup> Penn, *Up Funnel*, 18.

general labour market for skilled men. Recognizing its importance, the Admiralty established the Cooper Key Committee in 1877 to investigate and make recommendations on the future of engineering. Two of its recommendations were to increase the social status of the entrants to the engineering colleges and to institute a regularized career path for commissioned officers.<sup>42</sup> Such officers were given not only increased pay and improved titles but also integration into a single officers' mess aboard ship. By the 1880s, naval engineers were trained in a five-year course, and further professional training was available at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. By this time a definite career path was laid out for engineers, complete with enhanced expertise and commissioned status.

Still, engineering officers continued to be restrained by significant disabilities that did not affect their executive counterparts. First, the chances of promotion to posts of high responsibility were much lower. There was no possibility of achieving command of a ship or a squadron, or of obtaining a seat on the Board of Admiralty, and there were very few flag-equivalent positions. Rollo Appleyard wrote in 1900 that although there were 25,000 members of the engineering branch, there were only nine hundred commissioned officers; of these, only twenty were equivalent to the rank of captain, while there were over two hundred executive officers of post rank.<sup>43</sup> Even as late as 1918, when significant steps had been taken to improve conditions of service, promotion ratios were weighted against the

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<sup>42</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty to Consider the Best Means of Securing the Highest Mechanical Skill and Scientific Knowledge in the Management of the Various Engines of H.M. Ships of War and the Supply of Engineer Officers for H.M. Navy," vol. XXI, C. 4647 (1877).

<sup>43</sup> Rollo Appleyard, "With But After," *Fortnightly Review* (April 1900), 618.

engineers (see Table 5.2). While there were just under eleven junior executive officers for each captain, in the engineering branch the ratio was forty-two to one.

**Table 5.2 Promotion Ratios, Executive and Engineering Officers, 1918**

**Executive Officers**

Rank		Ratio
Rear Admiral	Other commissioned officers junior to Rear Admiral	1:56.4
Rear Admiral	To Captains	1:4.8
Captain	Other commissioned ranks junior to Captain	1:10.6

**Engineer Officers**

Rank		Ratio
Engineer Rear Admirals	Other commissioned Engineer Officers junior to Engineer Admirals	1:74.6
Engineer Rear Admirals	Engineer Captains	1:1.7
Engineer Captains	Other commissioned Engineers junior to Captain	1:42.0

*Source:* PRO, ADM 1/8541/281, Admiralty Engineer Officers Committee Report, 1918, 228.

At the turn of the century, engineer officers were compensated for some of these disabilities with higher pay, new titles and automatic promotion to the rank of engineer-commander by seniority (this compared to executive lieutenants who had to undergo the gauntlet of promotion by selection where perhaps only a third would reach that rank). On the other hand, there was a comparative advantage for engineers in seeking employment in civilian life that executive officers did not have. “Nowadays the lieutenants find themselves embarked with marine officers, surgeons, chaplains, engineers, paymasters, and naval instructors: all educated gentlemen of good social position, and all of them in receipt of greater privileges as regards pay, leave, accommodation, and service then

themselves.”<sup>44</sup> To make matters worse, a contributor to the *United Service Magazine* observed that: “Promotion among the lieutenants goes by selection and that means than those who are lucky enough to be born with interest or to be able to make interest during their service, generally manage to get promoted; but the majority who have to go where they are sent, and serve with bad or uninfluential captains, invariably fail to get promoted.”<sup>45</sup>

Engineers argued that the conditions of service and the lack of opportunity meant that the Admiralty had great difficulty in recruiting men from the professional classes to man its engine rooms. The result, according to professional engineers, was that there was a deskilling and a lowering of the status of naval engineers. For instance, in the 1870s the Navy began to slash the number of junior commissioned engineers by the introduction of a new warrant rank known as Engine-Room Artificers (E.R.A.) in order to save the cost of training and pay of those performing engineering functions.<sup>46</sup> As the needs of the service grew after the Naval Defence Act of 1889, the Navy resorted to expedients to fill essential posts. For instance, in the 1890s the Admiralty recruited emergency service engineers directly from the technical colleges who were trained less extensively than Keyham students. D.B. Morison feared that Keyham would be placed on the chopping block when parents learned that they could enter their sons into the Navy from much less

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<sup>44</sup> “Lieutenants R.N.: Worth Their Weight in Gold,” *United Service Magazine*, XXIV (November 1901), 107.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>46</sup> Penn, *Up Funnel*, 100.

expensive technical colleges.<sup>47</sup> As a result, engineers charged that the Navy directly attempted to subvert the professional status of existing engineer officers.

Control over workspace and working conditions was of vital importance. For this reason Charles Johnston, a former naval engineer, condemned the Admiralty's decision in 1900 to shift responsibility for some machinery to the control of torpedo and gunnery lieutenants. "It will be seen that this order takes away certain machinery and certain scientific weapons from the engineer and places them in the hands of officers who are not only not engineers, but who have had no practical mechanical education, and the reason assigned is one of expediency, not efficiency."<sup>48</sup>

One of the reasons why the Admiralty took this decision, however, was a problem that was similar to that which confronted the executive branch: numbers that lagged considerably behind demand. As a result, many prospective recruits believed that the responsibilities of engineer officers were inordinately heavy in comparison to counterparts in the merchant service. Indeed, Johnston pointed out that in the Royal Navy the ratio of engineer officers to ratings in battleships was 1:21, whereas in passenger steamers the ratio was 1:8.<sup>49</sup> Given the increasing complexity of warships this figure, he argued, was unconscionable. Hence, by not employing a sufficient number of accredited engineers, the Navy was risking not only the safety of crews but also the security of the British Isles. As one writer put it:

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<sup>47</sup> D.B. Morison. "The British Naval Engineer," *TIME*, XII (1900-1901), 10-11.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Johnston, "The Doom of the Naval Engineer," *Engineering Magazine*, XXIII (September 1902), 823-824.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

How many people supposed as they gazed with pride on the splendid assemblage of ships at the Jubilee Review at Spithead, that every shift conceivable had to be made to get together enough engineers and men to man the engine-rooms; that the splendid array of ships was – a splendid array of ships, and nothing more; that it was no more able to safeguard the honour of the Empire than the cardboard array moved by the scene-shifter at a theatre!<sup>50</sup>

Hence, navalist arguments were used to bolster the case of particular officers.

The opposition of many executive branch officers to the elevation of engineers and other officers was based to some degree on social status. The status and authority of the executive were part and parcel of the unwritten contract that the Admiralty had tacitly made with young officers and their parents when they entered the service at an early age. In exchange for certain hardships, a highly specialized education that was useful solely for a naval career and low initial pay, other intangible rewards, such as a reasonable chance of further promotion and the possibility of achieving high command, would be available. Social status and the marks of executive command were integral parts of the identification of young executive officers. The specializations and diversification of skills aboard ship struck at a sense of their professional and social superiority, especially for commissioned lieutenants and most especially for non-specialists, or “salt horse” officers, who had no other professional qualifications and faced an uphill battle in the race against “the ogre of the age limit.”<sup>51</sup> Every concession in status to the engineers became a sort of a zero-sum game in which the intangible rewards of junior executive officers were being systematically reduced.

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Lart, “The Dearth of Naval Engineers,” *Nineteenth Century*, XLVII (May 1900), 724.

<sup>51</sup> C.S. Forester, *Brown on Resolution* (London: Pan, 1929, 1963), 42.

As a result, symbols became flash points on a variety of issues that excited considerable comment and compelled even senior officers to express deep misgivings. The first was the granting of executive-style titles not just to engineer officers but also to medical doctors and accounting officers. As one writer commented derisively:

But what a lot of lieutenants we shall have! To begin with, I suppose we shall still have the salthorse lieutenant, then the gunnery lieutenant, the torpedo lieutenant, the navigation lieutenant, the engineer lieutenant, the bo'sun lieutenant, the gunner lieutenant (and we must look out not to mix him up with the gunnery lieutenant), and finally the carpenter lieutenant. A friend of mine wants to know if we are not to have a walrus lieutenant, as the carpenter will feel very lonesome without him; and if so, whether the walrus lieutenant is to be kept solely for Arctic service, or is to take his turn in the engine-room with all the other lieutenants.<sup>52</sup>

The attachment to uniform and the symbolism of rank did not weaken even after nearly a dozen years of the combined training scheme that was inaugurated in 1902. When the first new scheme officers were about to receive commissions in 1913, there was considerable concern that existing engineer officers should have executive authority to ensure they could give direction to these new men who possessed executive status themselves. Although an order-in-council had been implemented to enable executive officers to be placed under the orders of non-military officers for particular tasks, engineers held this insufficient.<sup>53</sup> Before arbitrarily awarding the executive curl and uniforms to engineers, the Second Sea Lord, Vice Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, consulted senior officers of the fleet. Jellicoe was taken aback by responses, such as that put

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<sup>52</sup> "The New Admiralty Scheme," *Naval and Military Record*, 2 April 1903, 2.

<sup>53</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1708, Memorandum by J.R. Jellicoe, 11 September 1913.



forward by Rear Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, who argued that it ridiculous to make engineers executives because they were not seamen:

His [the engineer's] environment is one which calls for no *eye* training whatever. The condition of the elements surrounding him, except for differences of temperature and sea motion, are always the same. He is never called upon to combat the elements, or to face constantly changing conditions... *He wields and controls no offensive weapon whatever.*<sup>54</sup>

The First Sea Lord, Battenberg, was mystified at the reaction of his fellow flag officers that he saw as an almost deliberate misunderstanding of what the Admiralty was attempting to accomplish. "It is solely for the purpose of effecting a workable amalgamation between the two sets of officers, until the older one has died out."<sup>55</sup> Such a move had to wait until the return of Fisher to the Admiralty and a new Order-in-Council in January 1915.<sup>56</sup>

Another grievance was that there was no seat on the Board of Admiralty for the Engineer-in-Chief, who had the equivalent rank of Rear Admiral (later raised to Vice Admiral) but lacked the authority to deal with specific engineering questions directly with his professional colleagues afloat. Instead, all communications had to pass through the hands of the executive officer commanding the ship before any papers could be sent to his office in Whitehall. This state of affairs was regarded as a professional affront and a humiliation that the head of the Engineering Branch could not have direct contact with his

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<sup>54</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1708, Enclosure to letter by Rear Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, 1<sup>st</sup> Battle Squadron, 4 November 1913, emphasis in original.

<sup>55</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1708, Minute by Battenberg, January 1914.

<sup>56</sup> Penn, *Up Funnel*, 149.

colleagues and professional subordinates. Even regarding promotion and advancement, the Engineer-in-Chief had little input because the Second Sea Lord, an executive officer, was in control.<sup>57</sup> Hence, engineers at every turn were kept under the control of technically unqualified executive officers who seemed determined to have a finger in every pie.

Furthermore, the process whereby engineer officers could be held accountable for misconduct or violation of professional standards was completely out the hands of the engineering branch and, consequently, untouched by professional review. The mechanism for punishing officers, save for minor incidents, was through the system of courts martial. The problem was that Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions forbade engineers, or any other "civil" branch officers, from sitting on these boards.<sup>58</sup> Although engineer officers frequently appeared as witnesses, they could not be involved in the system of generating court findings or the fixing of sentences. Indeed, an engineer officer accused of misconduct was to be tried by "deck officers ... who probably could not distinguish between a reducing-valve and a stuffing-box."<sup>59</sup> This understandably was a grave matter of concern, since the mechanism of affixing wrongdoing and enforcing professional standards was essentially removed from the engineers, and the mark of a great profession was denied. Control over entry and the maintenance of standards was the chief characteristic of any occupational group aspiring to professional status. However, the

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<sup>57</sup> However, an Engineering Officer Assistant was assigned to the Second Sea Lord's office, see PRO, ADM 1/8496/182, Appointment of Engineer Captain W. Toop as Assistant to the Second Sea Lord, 1917.

<sup>58</sup> PRO, ADM 116/75, Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, Chapter III.

<sup>59</sup> Appleyard, "With But After," 620. Indeed, after the war this was recognized by the Judge Advocate of the Fleet in his pushing for the extension of courts martial processes. See PRO, ADM 1/8556/110, Memorandum by the Judge Advocate of the Fleet, 12 April 1919.

agitation for engineer officers to sit on courts martial was consistently frustrated on the grounds that only executives had training in legal procedures.<sup>60</sup>

This was a rather specious argument, since executive officers in reality had little training in this area, a fact that led to almost constant complaints by the Judge Advocate General of the Fleet and even some executive officers over the handling of courts martial.<sup>61</sup> While the senior officers' courses at Greenwich devoted some time to the handling of legal proceedings, most of the training was gained "on the job" or by a close reading of the Queen's Regulations and adherence to the "customs of the service." To argue that engineer officers were incapable of learning the same way was seen rightly as motivated by a desire to retain control. Only the executive branch and the class from which it sprang (or at least the traditions of that class) was fit to govern. One officer wrote that giving judicial powers to the engineers would be akin to giving such authority to factory owners, which he claimed would damage the integrity of the justice system.<sup>62</sup>

Executive officers were in effect seen as adjuncts (if not actual members) of the British governing class. Naval officers dealt with defaulters in their own ships and awarded minor punishments, even though flogging had been effectively abolished. The "traditions of the sea" had left naval officers with all sorts of quasi-judicial functions that they were loath to relinquish or share. According to the Naval Discipline Act, the Board

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<sup>60</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8620/34, Eligibility of Engineer Officers to Sit on Courts Martial.

<sup>61</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1202, Naval Discipline Committee, 1912; Memorandum by Lieutenant R. Bevan on Ship's Police.

<sup>62</sup> Thursfield, "Training of Seamen," 1015, comments by Captain A.C. Corry.

of Admiralty was the court of final appeal in naval cases and was invested with the legal power to have those convicted of serious crimes executed.

Engineer officers also wished to have the power to administer minor punishments to the men of their own department. To paraphrase Admiral Charles Fitzgerald, since the Navy had become a self-propelled coal mine and had come to resemble an industrial workplace, industrial discipline was required.<sup>63</sup> Since this particular industrial workplace was a naval vessel, it seemed imperative that military discipline be used to maintain the efficiency of engine rooms. This was particularly important in dealing with stoker ratings, since they entered later than the men in the seaman branch, and many had been exposed to the “virus” otherwise known as trade unionism. Further, evidence suggests that the executive had great difficulty dealing with stokers in both the Portsmouth riots of 1906 and the *Zealandia* mutiny of 1914.<sup>64</sup> With the executives seemingly out of touch with the stokers, professional engineers aboard ship argued that they should be able to fill that gap because they were immediately responsible for the efficiency of their department.<sup>65</sup>

Engineers considered it imperative that they be able to deal with disorder in their own departments without reference to the officer of the watch, who would often be a non-specialist officer many years junior to the chief engineer in both age and experience. To engineers this seemed unduly humiliating.

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<sup>63</sup> C.C.P. Fitzgerald, “The War Training of the Navy: A Reply to Sir G. Hornby,” *United Service Magazine*, III (1891), 4.

<sup>64</sup> Indeed, this point was raised by Rollo Appleyard immediately following the Portsmouth disturbances. *The Times*, 12 November 1906. For an account of the *Zealandia* disturbance see PRO, ADM 156/77 and ADM 156/157.

<sup>65</sup> *The Times*, 12 November 1906. In a letter to the editor, Rollo Appleyard questioned Lieutenant Collard’s capacity to understand stokers and advocated the extension of the authority of engineers to deal with disciplinary infractions.

Thus a “Fleet,” [Engineer] perhaps over fifty years of age, who has had thirty years’ experience of managing large numbers of men, is not allowed the same power that a Marine Officer just out of his teens, or a young sub, perhaps twenty years old, or a Supplementary Lieutenant fresh from the merchant service, and quite unused to naval discipline – if he happens to be the senior Executive Officer on duty– is considered eligible and competent to exercise. Surely the work the Engineers do is, in its fullest sense, executive; they must get that work done, they must trust important duties to their subordinates, and if, through inattention or carelessness, the unfortunate Engineer-in-Charge gets court martialled or dismissed from the fault of a man he is not given authority to control.<sup>66</sup>

Here, the engineers ran headlong into the prerogatives of the executive branch and, in particular, the interests and authority of junior executive officers. While they were the officers of the watch they represented the authority of the captain in matters related to the reporting of offences. Deck officers argued that there could only be one captain in a ship and that it would be harmful if there were two distinct lines of disciplinary power. What the engineers were after was a separate sphere of operations not subject to interference from other executive officers. However, by custom, law and precedent the captain of a ship was responsible for all matters pertaining to its operations. By establishing a state within a state, this authority would be greatly circumscribed. Further, as a minority of the Douglas Committee in 1905 argued:

The centralization of authority in the Captain and Executive Officer, and the delegation of control of the Heads of Departments, has been up to the present considered the safest and best form of ship government; this under the present proposals would in time be converted into a *Committee of ship management with the Captain as Chairman*.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> An Engineer (Not R.N.), *The Royal Naval Engineer as Student and Officer* (Plymouth: James H. Keys, 1899), 17.

<sup>67</sup> PRO, ADM 116/996, Minority Report of the Douglas Committee, 1905, 38.

The idea of a ship's captain having limited professional authority was a violation of an essential part of the executive officer's training, since his competence was judged solely by his performance in conning and navigating a ship. However, this was not the way officers saw their function. While safe navigation was certainly important, it was generally considered less so, even though the Navigation line had been integrated with the executive thirty years before. Executive officers were primarily agents for exercising command at sea in operations requiring either the use of force or diplomacy. They saw themselves as, in effect; the guardians of the national interest and closely integrated into the British imperial system.<sup>68</sup>

Other concerns related to titles of command. The very titles engineers bore, whether Fleet Engineer or Inspector of Machinery, emphasized that they were civil branch officers. When the Selborne Scheme was introduced, the new engineering officers were to be called lieutenants (E), etc., while the old scheme officers would be called engineer-lieutenants and would not be considered executives. Charles Johnston, a retired naval engineer, was particularly bitter in this regard.

I sometime wonder whether the Admiralty have grown to believe - because the present engineer officers have waited so long ... that these officers can be always be relied upon to mistake the shadow for the substance, and to accept as an unmerited concession an "unconsidered trifle" they may contemptuously fling to them? Unless their lordships do entertain some such opinion as this of the engineer officers of the navy, it is difficult to conceive by what line of reasoning they can have

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<sup>68</sup> Barry Gough, "Profit and Power: Informal Empire, the Navy and Latin America," in R.E. Dumett (ed.), *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: the New Debate on Empire* (London: Longman, 1999), 62-82.

persuaded themselves that such a miserable burlesque of executive rank could be acceptable to the present engineer officers.”<sup>69</sup>

Two months earlier Johnston was even more violent in tone:

And what does the new scheme confer upon the present engineers in the service? An empty title, shorn of all the privileges, the accessories and the authority which executive rank has heretofore conferred upon its possessors! – ‘a thing of shred and patches!’ a discreditable counterfeit foisted on the country as a generous concession....”<sup>70</sup>

Finding Johnston’s argument specious, Admiral Fitzgerald argued:

My own private opinion is that a great many of my friends amongst the present engineers – especially those who are gifted with a sense of humour – will feel nothing of satisfaction, but rather shame and humiliation, in adopting bogus titles which have been conferred upon them, in answer to the screaming of a few noisy snobs who still lurked amidst their ranks... It certainly does seem strange that in this 20<sup>th</sup> century, men who are otherwise quite sane, are unable to see that there is nothing in a name save that which it indicates.<sup>71</sup>

In a joint dissent to the conclusions of the Douglas Committee on Engineering Officers, Rear Admiral S.H.M. Login, Commodore C.J. Briggs and Captain Reginald Bacon quipped that “[i]t might be argued by the Officers of the Military Branch that to double their pay and make them all Baronets would, from the improvement of their position and the added prestige of a title, cause the men to look on them with increased respect. Nor is this argument one whit more nebulous than those advanced by the Engineer Officers....”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Johnston, “The British Naval Engineer Under the New Scheme,” *Engineering Magazine*, XXIV (March 1903), 908-909.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Johnston, “A Destructive Criticism,” *The Naval and Military Record*, 8 January 1903.

<sup>71</sup> C.C.P. Fitzgerald, “The Admiralty Scheme: The New Regulations for the Entry and Training of Naval Officers,” *United Service Magazine*, XXVI (March 1903), 588.

<sup>72</sup> PRO, ADM 116/996, Dissenting Report of the Douglas Committee, 1905, 35.



Still, it was rather disingenuous to argue that executive officers did not care very much for titles, since rank was one of the psychic benefits of a naval career. Indeed, when he was a young boy Andrew Cunningham playfully imagined himself as a full admiral and from there took a fancy toward naval service.<sup>73</sup> Nor did this concern cease even when an officer had spent nearly a lifetime in the service. After the war, for example, a group of officers who had not been promoted campaigned aggressively for elevation to flag rank without an increase in pay since they thought their prospects of employment and social position outside the navy were so much better as rear admirals than captains. The Admiralty denied their request because it would tend to cheapen the title. If so much energy was expended in trying to achieve higher rank, was it not perhaps questionable to claim that the title was merely functional?<sup>74</sup> As a sort of final stab at the “agitators,” one officer charged that their constant badgering and airing of grievances was causing problems with recruitment, since no one wanted to join a profession that was constantly complaining.<sup>75</sup>

There was also a concern that the values of a mechanical profession such as engineering would infect the executive officer corps. If everything was subjected to natural laws of mechanics, and if life was reduced to mathematical calculation, it would strike at a significant portion of military command. As one writer put it:

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<sup>73</sup> Andrew B. Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey: The Autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), 13-14.

<sup>74</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8714/175 Submission for Flag Rank for Axed officers, 1923. See also Admiral Edward Field, “The New Admiralty Scheme” *The Times*, 10 January 1903; where the retired admiral attempted to define the term “admiral” from the original Arabic to mean “chief of the sea” and hence to emphasize the importance of command.

<sup>75</sup> “Against Common Training,” *United Service Magazine*, XXVI (February 1903), 472.

Where human life and enormous amounts of valuable property are at stake, it is the bounden duty of all concerned, whether owners or otherwise, to insist on every possible precaution being taken to minimize the risk; therefore, any appliance or arrangement which in any way tends to this desideratum demands careful and prompt consideration. Political economists tell us that every loss, whether of life or property, is a national loss, and is not confined to the individual.<sup>76</sup>

In this worldview, military command, killing an opponent or risking one's own destruction as matters of professional training were of lesser importance. For instance, this same argument was used in the 1860s when the Admiralty investigated the integration of the Master (or Navigation) branch into the executive. Many officers had reservations because they perceived that the principal duty of the master was to ensure the safety of his ship rather than to take risks.<sup>77</sup>

In the words of Cyprian Bridge, in his commentary on the construction of *Dreadnought*, the first all-big-gun battleship in 1906:

Until we put the treatment of inert material in its proper place, and make study of naval warfare the first demand on a naval officer's attention, our present methods, with all their intolerable costliness, will continue. A knowledge of naval warfare cannot be acquired, like a knowledge of Esperanto, by attendance at occasional lectures. Instead of spending most of his time dabbling with material, the Naval Officer should devote his attention so thoroughly to considering the problems of war that a knowledge of them will permeate his whole being.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> J.D. Churchill, "Marine Engine Governors, and the Benefits Derived from Them," *TIME*, I (1889), 5; See also "The Status of the Engineers," *The Fleet*, VI (1910), 10. "It is only by a most broad-minded view of the duties of a captain of a warship that we can disabuse our ideas of his importance as the director of the ship on its course, rather than as the director of its internal economy, and so discover that the best captain of a warship is not the one who has spent his life on the bridge looking over the waters, but who is the captain of the details of his ship."

<sup>77</sup> W.F. Martin, *Respecting the Abolition of the Masters as a Class of Officers in the Navy* (London: William Ridgeway, 1866), 3.

<sup>78</sup> "Material Versus Knowledge in Naval Warfare," *The Times*, 2 March 1906, 4.

Moreover, the advent of steam marked in many ways the death of traditional seamanship. Although there was much nostalgia surrounding sails and yards, the argument for their preservation was motivated more than that. As Admiral Bridge argued, “I can say ... that we are a long way past the age of sentiment. I doubt whether there is much sentiment left in a man after he has been a year or two first lieutenant of a ship.”<sup>79</sup> Indeed, this “sea sense” was fundamental to the survival of Great Britain as an independent power: “Other nations have risen in their turn, such as the Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch, on their sea power, and the ability and courage of their seamen; but fell away as soon as they failed to maintain this ‘Sea Spirit.’ We shall also fall if we have not got men enough inured to the sea.”<sup>80</sup>

Traditional seamanship was valued not merely because executive officers admired the beauty of fully rigged sailing vessels. Although many people thought (and still think) that “tall ships” were special, there was more to their attachment. The social and professional role of sails and masts served not only as a mechanism for training but also as a way of establishing the professional status of the executive officer. This extended even to the quality of voice that officers allegedly gained from sail training.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Thursfield, “The Training of Seamen,” 997; comments by C.A.G. Bridge.

<sup>80</sup> D.J. Munro, *The Roaring Forties and After* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1929), 99; see also, “Musings without Method,” *Blackwood's*, CLXXXV, No. 1120 (1909), 280-281. “Moreover, there is another reason why our Navy had lost something of the advantage which once belonged to it. That which in the old days was called ‘seamanship’ and which set us beyond the reach of France and Spain, has now been replaced by a mechanical skill, in which other nations may reasonably expect to equal us. Every new invention every artifice, which decreases the importance of personal skill and bravery, even if they are adopted instantly by our Navy, helps our enemies to overtake us...”

<sup>81</sup> PRO, ADM 144/22, Admiralty Circular, 13 December 1905. Expressing concern that officers landed for shore duty were unsatisfactory in their capacity to give verbal orders, the lack of sail training was blamed. “It appears probable that this defect in the executive qualities of the younger officers is largely due to the

By undercutting that fundamental function threatened the social role, the growth of steam engineering not necessarily of the ship's captain but of inferior commissioned officers. As the editor of the *Spectator* wrote in 1890:

In Captain Marryatt's days, the main stress of... duty at sea fell on the First Lieutenant. Even if the drunken, sea-sick crew obeyed orders better than he expected, he was always in a fever of anxiety lest yards, masts, ropes, or blocks might fail under the strain of actual service.... Now the First Lieutenant has an easy berth, and the heavy duties fall upon the Engineer officer. Down below the waterline, among rods and levers, steam and fire, darkness and din, he labours to get something like their nominal speed out of the engines.<sup>82</sup>

While the ship's captain remained in overall control, the sphere of responsibility seemed to close in on junior officers. The mechanical aspect of the profession was bitterly resisted as unworthy of those destined to lead the fleet into battle. Hence, when Commander A.C. Dewar attempted to reduce the command function of the navy to a form of Taylorism gone amok, he was regarded as not quite "sound."<sup>83</sup>

Traditional seamanship was valued as the mark of the professional executive officer. Indeed, the most important examination for any midshipman was in that field. Only when a young man had it could he advance to the rank of acting sub-lieutenant and proceed to become a lieutenant. Further, performance on this exam could gain young officers substantial seniority that in future could lead to more rapid promotion than their

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disappearance of masts and sails and the consequent extinction of the necessity for hailing aloft." Indeed, officers could be held back from promotion due to this cause as in the example of Commander H.M.C. Festing. See ADM 7/930, Summary of Commanders' Records, 48. Similarly Commander Gerard Bromley was held back from promotion. "Has a defective voice which in my opinion would render him unfit for command of a large masted ironclad." ADM 7/929, Confidential Commanders Book.

<sup>82</sup> "What our Naval Engineers Must Do," *The Spectator*, LXV (2 August 1890), 142-143.

<sup>83</sup> PRO, Board of Education Papers (ED) 12/305, paper "On Certain Aspects of Organisation" by Commander AC Dewar, 1917, 20.

term mates. Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon recalled at least one captain who refused on general principle to award a first-class certificate on the grounds that no midshipman ever born deserved such an accolade.<sup>84</sup>

Seamanship was a way of asserting the authority and validity of the executive officer class. In the age of sail the vast bulk of a warship's crew comprised seaman either aloft or below handling the great guns, and a liberal dose of marines. The specialized members of the crew, the idlers, though important, were comparatively few in number, and even the most skilled were mere warrant officers and very clearly under the authority of every line officer.

Further, there was the element of uncertainty, almost a seeking of the so-called "real experience" by which officers and men would challenge the forces of nature in the handling of ships under canvas.<sup>85</sup> And that danger did exist, as Admiral Sir George Ballard recalled service as a midshipman in the late 1870s:

I well remember the sickening horror with which as quite a youngster I first saw a blue-clad human figure whirling down with an awful rush from a hundred and fifty feet above the deck and striking violently.... overboard ... to sink from sight instantly and forever. I suppose that it was because it happened in cold blood and unexpectedly that it made a deeper impression on my mind at the time than the sight of hundreds falling under bullets and spears which I was destined to witness afterwards.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> R.S. Bacon, *A Naval Scrap Book, 1877-1901* (London: Hutchinson, 1940), 85.

<sup>85</sup> Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Modernism and Anti-Modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 103-107; see also, "Musings without Method," *Blackwood's*, CXCV, No. 1181 (April 1914), 580-581. "Science was the tyrant of the nineteenth century. It attempted to place the whole realm of human thought and human activity under its iron heel. So highly successful was its tyranny that it became a fashion, the worst of autocrats. All the arts clamoured to be admitted within the fashionable circle."

<sup>86</sup> George Ballard, "Admiral Ballard's Memoirs, pt. II," *Mariner's Mirror*, LXII, No. 1 (1976), 32.

Just how important the seamanship examination was considered to be was evidenced by Frederic Dreyer's publication of a guide for midshipmen.<sup>87</sup> Seamanship as a skill was seen as the hallmark of the professional executive officer. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby (known as "Uncle Geoff") wrote: "But the other quality – the care and the resource – I think can be distinctly traced to the teaching of the sails. Look at their teaching; how the attention is wrapt in enlisting them to help us on our way, and elude all that may endanger them or the ship that carries them."<sup>88</sup> Hornby was no diehard reactionary; in fact, he placed a high value upon the professional execution of duties. In the words of Fisher, "Admiral Hornby ... never allowed a fool within a mile of him!"<sup>89</sup> Training in seamanship also helped to teach young boys to become manly in the face of discomfort at an early age.<sup>90</sup>

In a similar fashion, another officer pointed to the beneficial aspects of traditional seamanship because it increased the spiritual and physical power of its practitioners:

These are the men we want, for a man who is a smart active sailor, holding his life as it were in his hand, and treating the risk as a bagatelle, so that he may excel others in ability and feats of smartness aloft, will be equally fearless and active at his gun. Contrast such a man, muscular, active, long-winded, deep-chested, fearless and daring to a degree, with a new raised man, round-shouldered, relaxed, with no

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<sup>87</sup> Frederic Dreyer, *How to Get a First Class in Seamanship: A Guide for Midshipmen of the Royal Navy* (Portsmouth: Griffin & Co., 1900).

<sup>88</sup> Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, "The War Training of the Navy- I," *United Service Magazine*, I (August 1890), 476.

<sup>89</sup> Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 256, Fisher to Selborne, 24 July 1902

<sup>90</sup> J.K. Laughton, "Naval Promotion Arithmetically and Historically Considered," *RUSI*, XXIV (1881), 555, comments by Vice Admiral Selwyn.

lasting powers, slow of mind and body, unused to danger, and chary of himself: they bear as much comparison as a recruit does to a smart colour-sergeant.<sup>91</sup>

Seamanship was valued because it defined a naval officer in a way that was patently not mechanical and did not conspire to reduce naval officers to mere “executive” instruments.<sup>92</sup> Seamanship involved the development of independence, the skill of command and the successful management of the collective efforts of subordinates.

The progress of the engineering profession within the naval establishment was, to say the least, problematic. Although the Admiralty found it possible to integrate the aspirations of other professions with only a small amount of fuss, the problem of the engineering branch was of an entirely different order. The chief problem was not technical education, or even mechanical skill, because the executive branch had adopted many of those facets in the 1860s and 1870s. After all, the *Britannia* system, the Royal Naval College and the advent of the great specializations in Gunnery, Torpedo and Navigation were based on scientific and technical education. Further, a whole battery of re-examinations and investigative committees through the half-century or so were based around finding a balance between scholastic education and practical training of naval officers in an era of increasing technological complexity. This ought to have put paid to facile arguments that the old sea dogs hated engineering merely because it was new. The practice of engineering was not at issue, for as one officer argued, the idea of

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<sup>91</sup> “BO” Gunnery Officer, *A Few Words About our Navy* (London: Edward Stanford, 1867), 16. See also, F.T. Bullen, *The Passing of the Sailing Ship*, *The Spectator*, 7 May 1910. “All hands shorten sail! Oh yes, that was the order; but thirteen men, at least they called themselves men, just couldn’t or wouldn’t, and didn’t do anything, but get in the way and shiver with fright.”

<sup>92</sup> James Goodenough, “The Preliminary Education of Naval Officers,” *RUSI*, XV (1871), 339-340.



manipulating the forces of nature for the good of humanity was as old as civilization itself.<sup>93</sup>

The problem was not engineering *per se* but the professional engineers who visibly appeared to be threatening the authority of the executive officers while aspiring to their own social elevation. In their bid to raise the status and authority of professional marine engineering, the Board of Admiralty was going to be the obvious target of agitation because it was one of the largest employers of professional marine engineers in the country. If a major victory could be scored for the profession in the Navy, it would greatly strengthen the hand of engineers in all related industries. Further, the Admiralty as a public department should have been uniquely vulnerable to this form of agitation because it spent so much of the government's money, employed so many people, and could be cross-examined in Parliament and the press. Also, technical developments that were obvious even to casual observers made it clear that the expertise of professional engineers was crucial to national security. And in view of the experience of the officer class in the Army in the South African War, the senior service was naïve if it considered itself immune from the same type of criticism.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, since the Board of the Admiralty was effectively dominated by executive officers, it was apparent that this also meant an attack on the prerogatives of the military branch. Hence, to increase the status of engineering meant dealing with the Admiralty, which had the authority to establish entrance standards and to enact regulations of service for its engineers.

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<sup>93</sup> Thursfield, "Training of Seamen," 992-993, comments by Gerard Noel.

<sup>94</sup> See, M.V. Brett (ed.), *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (4 vols., London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), II, 183-184. "Our difficulty is that our lawyers and physicians are professional men, but until quite lately our soldiers have been amateurs – and soldiering a pastime and not a 'business.'"

Executive officers were uncomfortable with suggestions that came close to asserting that engineers and their machinery could solve all the problems faced by the Navy. First, naval officers disliked the notion that navies existed solely to fight other navies; and second, they feared that mechanistic determinism would deprive commanders of individuality and reduce naval affairs to a sterile, depersonalized endeavour.<sup>95</sup> Executive officers knew, even if they did not express it very well, that there was something more to carrying out the duties of a naval officer than looking after machinery. The so-called “sublime” aspects of the naval profession – history, strategy and tactics – had roles to play in reasserting the importance of individual judgement. Moreover, the advent of the staff system of command enabled commanders to integrate complex and complicated machinery without undue delay.<sup>96</sup>

The ultimate solution to the engineering problem in the R.N. was the obliteration of the professional engineer. The mechanism by which this was to be accomplished was the new scheme of entry and education put forward as the Selborne Scheme in December 1902.<sup>97</sup> The Scheme was designed to offer common entry and training to all three combatant branches of the officer corps, the executive, engineers and marines. In essence, the engineers would become part and parcel of the executive. To some in the professional

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<sup>95</sup> Gerard Noel, “The War Training of the Navy,” *United Service Magazine*, III (1891), 375 “The most important part of war-training, both for officers and men, is to initiate them into the mysteries of seamanship; a matter not understood by any who have not experienced the working part of sea-life. Seamanship is the science which enables its possessor to effectively combat the elements under all circumstances, and it is the want of it which renders the ordinary landsman helpless on board ship when any difficulty occurs.”

<sup>96</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *The Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 89.

<sup>97</sup> BPP, “Memorandum dealing with the Entry, training and Employment of Officers and Men of the Royal Navy and of the Royal Marines, December 1902,” vol. LXI, Cd. 1385 (1903), 677.

engineer community, this was a positive step since they had been attempting to distance themselves from workingmen for decades. Elevation to equality with the executive came at the price of no longer being able to use the Admiralty as a whipping boy. It also meant cutting off the existing supply of engineering officers at a critical time in the Navy's expansion. In the end, the latter problem would destroy the Scheme's goal of complete integration of all three branches.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Robert L. Davison, "The Selborne Scheme: A Study in Failure," paper presented to the Society for Military History Annual Meeting, Bethesda, MD, May 2004.

## Chapter VI

### The Reinvention of the Officer Corps

The country pays for the navy, and has the right to demand the best men for the best berths. Surely, then, it is an injustice to the heavily-burdened taxpayer, and to our glorious traditions that matters should be allowed to remain as at present. Sons in law and nephews of peers have no right when they enter a profession to be jumped over the heads of other sons who cannot boast of titled relations.<sup>1</sup>

My brain was crammed with dull facts, it became sodden as a saturated sponge, and as a result my memory deteriorated about 80%. Fortunately this lifted the safety valve, the million and one futile facts dropped out like mud through the bottom of a dredger, and the brain, after some years, at last became free to think again. Imagination and mental elasticity ... were fortunately not assassinated; but they had a narrow escape.<sup>2</sup>

One response of the executive officer corps was to cast about for visible marks of legitimacy while simultaneously attempting to secure the older foundations of authority. As has been demonstrated in chapters four and five, the legitimacy of the executive's leadership was under pressure, and new ways had to be found to shore up their position to convince the general population that they could be trusted to perform their professional tasks in the era of steam and steel. Claims of authority had to be based upon sources other than birth, social position or some sort of mystical affinity for the sea. The key, then, was to co-opt the most visible aspects of modern middle-class professionalism in such a way that naval officers would carry out their duties with minimal interference from other professions, meddling politicians and their associates in the press.

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<sup>1</sup> "Promotion in the Navy," *The Naval and Military Record*, 5 March 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), R. Drax Papers (DRAX) 1/21, Rough Notes on Education, 1918.

The first mechanism was the gradual shift to a more centralized Admiralty control over entry and promotion than hitherto existed.<sup>3</sup> Further, criteria for selection for promotion and entry were to be based on quantifiable educational qualifications and competitive examinations. Although safeguards were introduced to ensure that only the most “suitable” entered the service, there was no doubt that the Admiralty required specific professional attainments for entry to the quarterdeck. Gradually, as power became concentrated in the hands of the Admiralty administration, there was a gradual tightening of regulations regarding promotion and education that became more apparent after the turn of the century. Promotions based solely on patronage were abolished or at least curtailed so much that they became a mechanism to promote officers who would have been advanced in the ordinary course of affairs. Also, the flow of promotion and the career expectations of officers became more regularized, and they were compelled to follow prescribed career patterns designed to advance only the visibly most able. Even the most sacrosanct “right” of captains to be promoted to rear admiral by seniority, though not abolished, became greatly circumscribed.<sup>4</sup>

The second mechanism was the advent of scientific education and the development of the Royal Navy’s educational institutions that had been virtually nonexistent prior to the 1850s. Where in former times a boy could enter the service directly with a nomination from a senior officer or the First Lord and a simple test, now an entire battery of examinations in everything from French to steam engineering was

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<sup>3</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, “Officers, Gentlemen and Their Education, 1793-1860,” in Edward Freeman (ed.), *Les Empires en Guerre et Paix, 1793-1860: Journées Franco-Anglaises d’histoire de la Marine, Portsmouth, 23-26 Mars, 1988* (Vincennes: Service Historique de la Marine, 1990), 139-140.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 1/8370/65, Retirement and Promotion of Officers, 1914.

mandatory. After entrance, a full course of study was introduced in the cadet training ship, *Britannia*, and other courses were carried out in the seagoing fleet. When a midshipman completed three years of service afloat, he tried his seamanship examination and took the sub-lieutenants' courses at Greenwich. If he was particularly able he might be selected to study for the designation of torpedo or gunnery officer, which entailed another year of schoolwork. For a time, even officers who had been selected for promotion to commander were forced to pass a qualifying written examination. Advancement and seniority could be helped or retarded on the basis of examinations in which each officer competed against his fellows to gain an additional few months of seniority. All of this occurred in the space of a generation: Fisher's entrance examination consisted of reciting a few lines and jumping over a chair, while his protégé, the future Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, recalled in his autobiography that in the course of his career he had written sixty-seven examinations.<sup>5</sup>

These examinations and the education system in general were geared increasingly toward mathematics and the sciences. As in modern industrial operations, mathematics provided the basis of a scientific education that would equip naval officers with the skills required to cope with the ever-changing face of naval affairs.<sup>6</sup> Ships and weapon systems were rendered obsolete within a decade, and it seemed that the only constant was the use of mathematics, which provided the intellectual foundation of all modern developments in technology and organization. The Admiralty presumed that if officers possessed an

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<sup>5</sup> R.S. Bacon, *A Naval Scrap Book, 1877-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1940), 71.

<sup>6</sup> J.K. Laughton "Naval Education," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XXVI (1882), 361, comments by Gerard Noel.

intensive knowledge of this “Queen of the Sciences” it would guarantee the capacity to manage and control these scientific developments. Further, a quantifiable and readily measurable scale of professional intellectual capacity was welcomed as a way of buttressing the status and authority of executive officers. The ultimate expression of this trend was the “Christmas-box” in the form of the new scheme of entry and training of officers in 1902.<sup>7</sup> The Selborne Scheme was an attempt at the virtual annexation of the Engineering Branch and a frank admission that naval officers were to become something more akin to uniformed scientists than heirs of Nelson’s band of brothers:

In the old days it sufficed if a Naval Officer were a seaman. Now, he must be a seaman, a gunner, a soldier, an engineer, and a man of science as well. It is not only that machinery driven by electric, hydraulic or steam power is every year becoming more complicated in character and multiplying in form, and that therefore a more extensive education in applied science is necessary for specialised officers, but in various ways the need for a more general scientific training has become apparent.<sup>8</sup>

However, there was considerable disquiet throughout the executive concerning the value of mathematical education as carried out in *Britannia*, the Royal Naval College, *Vernon* and *Excellent*. Many critics, while conceding the importance of a solid foundation in mathematics, argued that the system seemed content to produce the appearance of such

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<sup>7</sup> C.C.P. Fitzgerald, *From Sail to Steam: Naval Recollections, 1878-1905* (London: Edward Arnold, 1916), 262.

<sup>8</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, “Parliamentary Papers, Memorandum Dealing with the Entry, Training and Employment of Officers and Men of the Royal Navy and of the Royal Marines,” vol. LXI, Cd. 1385 (1903), 677.

instruction without grasping its substance.<sup>9</sup> Officers were crammed with theoretical education, especially at the *Excellent*, without relating it to the practice of the naval profession. The result was a group of officers whose education left them less suited to taking a wider view of naval affairs than was perhaps optimal. Further, the importance placed on specialization was questionable, since it created an elite within the corps that was comprised of technicians rather than sea officers. Specialist officers spent considerable time not only training but also in administrative tasks aboard ship and in the Admiralty. Such officers spent only a year or so as ordinary watch-keeping lieutenants before beginning to specialize, and their duties aboard ship precluded them from standing watch or handling the tasks of an ordinary officer.

From the start, many officers had misgivings about the use of examination results and mathematics, since there was no way to quantify the importance of command or the personality of the commander. Mathematics did little to train officers to handle the unexpected, taught almost nothing about the handling of a naval force and did less to teach a young officer to manage and inspire subordinates. As we shall see in the following chapter, command was transformed as it too became scientifically based.

### **Entry and Promotion**

In common with other government departments, the Admiralty was from time to time criticized for “jobbery” and corruption in the awarding of contracts, appointments and

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<sup>9</sup> United States, Congress, Senate, *Congressional Papers*, James R. Soley, “Report on Foreign Systems of Naval Education,” Senate Executive Documents, 46<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, U.S. Serial Set # 1884, Executive Document No. 51 (1880), 89.



promotion of its civil staff, as well as for the close connection of appointments to the political currents of the day. The most visible example of this jobbery in the nineteenth century was the executive officer corps, which dominated the professional side of the Board of Admiralty, held prestigious commands and status within the naval service and in general comprised the most visible members of the establishment.<sup>10</sup> It was axiomatic, but true, that naval officers were entered and promoted on the basis of patronage and the shameless use of social and political connections. As we saw in chapter III, such interest was crucial to secure advancement when there was a glut of officers on the list all looking for employment. Yet despite Michael Lewis's apt distinction between what he considered "interest" and graft, and Admiral Sir Edmund Fremantle's argument that such advancements were beneficial, the perception of the general public was that this group progressed at public expense.<sup>11</sup> The more the officer corps convinced the public of the importance of the Navy and the higher the naval estimates became, the more it became imperative to provide a firmer foundation for the executive with promotion and selection by merit.

However, quick-fix solutions that merely forbade the most obvious forms of patronage were problematic. Regularized patterns of entry and promotion had to be maintained to give officers reasonable prospects in a fashion that had the mantle of legitimacy. This meant the entire system had to be overhauled, with a move toward

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher Dandeker, "Patronage and Bureaucratic Control: The Case of the Naval Officer in English Society," *British Journal of Sociology*, XXIX (1978), 302-303.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition, 1814-1864: A Social History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), 49-51. Fisher himself used to argue that favouritism was the foundation of efficiency since the officer preferred would be careful not to demonstrate that their superior had not made a mistake in advancing him over his fellows.

including mandatory retirement combined with actuarial calculations to ensure a good supply of officers fit to perform their duties.

The first mechanism was the use of entrance exams, as a competitive tool to give the appearance that candidates not only possessed the basic educational qualifications for *Britannia* but also that only the best boys would be selected. However, the competition had the appropriate safeguard of compelling all boys to secure a nomination for entry from the Admiralty or from a senior naval officer. The Order-in-Council of 1869 required that all cadets try an entrance exam administered by the Director of Education at the Admiralty. From 1882 to 1902 the Civil Service Commission (CSC) administered these examinations. Generally speaking, twice as many nominations were made available as spaces in the training ship, so competition was limited. The system was also hobbled by the existence of several exceptions. Five annual nominations were reserved for the sons of officers who had died while on active duty in either the army or navy; several more were for the sons of colonial gentlemen; and several were also earmarked for the merchant training establishments, *Worcester* and *Conway*.<sup>12</sup> Although these candidates had to pass a qualifying exam, they were immune from the competition rules. In this way, the fears of Sub-Lieutenant Reginald Tupper that unregulated and indiscriminate entry would be adopted were eased.<sup>13</sup>

The system of limited competition set the stage to combine the worst features of the competitive system while ensuring that only a select minority could hope to gain a

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<sup>12</sup> PRO, ADM 116/75, Queen's Regulations, 1893.

<sup>13</sup> Reginald Tupper, "On the Best Method of Providing the Best Officers and Men for the Royal Navy," *RUSI*, XXVI (1882), 330.

commission. The Navy was still addicted to early entry, which resulted in twelve- and thirteen-year-olds taking competitive examinations because it was considered imperative that the lads go to sea by the age of sixteen. Since the regular schools generally did not teach the appropriate curricula, parents often enrolled their sons in a "crammer" to prepare them for the examinations. These schools were not only fairly expensive but also widely considered to do a grave disservice to the cadets, for being "crammed" tended to overwork them and to impart only the capacity to pass exams rather than real education.<sup>14</sup>

After the advent of the Selborne Scheme in December 1902, the limited competition was replaced by a new system. The existing line officers that still controlled entry to the entire service placed more, not fewer, barriers to naval command. First, all candidates for cadetships had to present themselves before a selection committee chaired by an executive flag officer who was attended by a representative of the First Lord and a headmaster of one of the great public schools. All potential cadets were then interviewed and evaluated for their fitness to become officers and tried a qualifying exam to confirm their educational status. When the exam attracted some unfavourable comment, the Admiralty was compelled to release two Blue Books describing its methods.<sup>15</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>14</sup> BPP, "Selection of Candidates for Nomination as Naval Cadets- Reports of Members of the Interview Committee," vol. LIII, Cd. 1962 (1904), Memorandum by the Director of Naval Education, 488. See also G.L. Morley, "Our Crammers and Failures: By a Military Student," *United Service Magazine*, IV (June 1892), 300. "The crammers have been called a necessary evil, but the evil is the result of the severe competition... In such a struggle, the carefully-trained alone can win, and the crammers have brought the art of training unpromising competitors to a science."

<sup>15</sup> BPP, "Selection of Candidates for Nominations as Naval Cadets Reports of Members of the Interview Committees," vol. LIII, Cd. 1962 (1904); "Selection of Candidates for Nominations as Naval Cadets - Further Reports of members of the Interview Committees," vol. XLVIII, Cd. 2450 (1905).

smelling a hint of “jobbery,” the Civil Service Commission refused to administer the exams.<sup>16</sup>

Further, the interview process gave the committee the opportunity to test the minds and manners of young men. In the words of the editor of *The Spectator*, “[i]t is this alone which makes an owner, who has nothing but performances and the stud-book to go by, willing to adventure thousands of pounds for one yearling, while he would not offer as many pence for another. In the case of human colts, we must conclude the same law holds good.”<sup>17</sup> Still, members of the interview committees were more sanguine in their approach and couched the criteria to give the appearance that class bias was minimized and that instead the examination had a “scientific” authority. The candidates first were rated according to a set of criteria, and each was assigned a letter grade depending upon his suitability, for example A+, B-, C, etc.) Table 6.1, below, shows the results for the 1903 selection.

**Table 6.1 Results of the 1903 Selection Committee**

Group	Class	Number
Fit	A+	12
	A	36
	A-	33
Doubtful	B+	50
	B	72
	B-	33
Unsuitable	C+	6
	C	31
	C-	5
Total		278

Source: BPP, “Selection Committee 1904,” 502

<sup>16</sup> PRO, ADM 1/7711, Civil Service Commission to Admiralty, 13 January 1903.

<sup>17</sup> “The School Boy and the Admirals,” *The Spectator*, 1 April 1905, 472.

Furthermore, the committee members were careful to avoid the use of class criteria, since in the words of James Gow, the Headmaster of Westminster College, “The function of the examiners was to form an estimate of the TOTAL ENERGY – intellectual, physical and moral – of each candidate.”<sup>18</sup> A.C. Benson, a former headmaster of Eton, wrote of the June 1904 committee that

In the first place I tried to observe the boy’s physique, his character, his general bearing, his self-possession, and his *savoir faire*; moreover I endeavoured to gauge what his social environment had been. I do not think that too great stress ought to be laid on this latter point. But I may say that I believe that there are two kinds of ... breeding; there is a real inferiority of tone which can hardly be disguised, even in a boy who has been brought up under favourable social influences, and there is also a superficial deficiency in manners, betraying itself in bearing and pronunciation, which could be very soon eliminated under improved conditions.<sup>19</sup>

While maintaining control over entry into the corps, the executive branch managed to rig the appearance of objective authority in keeping with the political and social atmosphere. Entry gradually shifted to a system based on a scientific examination of the cadets according to widely accepted professional standards, while at the same time reinforcing the traditional bias in the system.

In the later part of the nineteenth century a systematic and organized career structure for executive naval officers was introduced for the first time. This career structure attempted to move away from promotion based on patronage to one more in keeping with the general trend of merit in education. Although as early as in the first part

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 502.

<sup>19</sup> BPP, “Reports of Departmental Committee Appointed to Consider Certain Questions Concerning the Extension of the New Scheme of Training for Officers of the Navy,” vol. LXX, Cd. 2450 (1906), 455.

of the eighteenth century there were regulations for the various ranks of the service, not until later in the nineteenth that the Admiralty managed to impose career patterns. As we saw in chapter IV, the legacy of the Napoleonic wars was an enormous surplus of officers; there was no mechanism to clear the lists by forced retirements due to the vested interest of several thousand gentlemen who possessed the King's commission. The 1870 Childers retirement scheme, which imposed mandatory retirement on the basis of age and non-service, marked the point at which career patterns came under direct Admiralty control. At the same time, specific regulations were introduced to tighten qualifications for advancement. An officer was generally required to serve certain lengths of time at sea in each particular rank prior to receiving promotion. There were also attempts to impose some regularity on the advancement of officers, if only to lower expenditures.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, until blockages in promotion were rectified, there was no way to eliminate promotion by patronage. Often the only way to prepare a reasonably young admiral to serve when he reached the flag list was to advance him rapidly in the lower lists.

The Admiralty found gradually through various studies that only careful management of the executive officer lists would produce a corps that was able to rise to the occasion in the event of international conflict but that also kept half-pay or retirement benefits in check. Part of the problem, in the view of the government and many professional officers, was the age of admirals, since they advanced to flag rank strictly by seniority. To limit costs associated with the flag list, the number of officers on that list was strictly limited, but only half would be employed in the event of general

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<sup>20</sup> For instance in 1869-1870 active service officers cost the Exchequer £764,000 in full pay, half pay £723,000 and pensions £793,000.

mobilization. As we shall see below, the preservation of patronage and special promotions enabled these younger men to reach post rank at an age where they could afford to wait until they reached the top of the seniority list and still be spry enough for active command. These were seen as abuses that permitted the elite to push their relations and friends at the expense of less connected brother officers.

As naval education became more detailed and expensive it was necessary for the service to extract considerable work from officers when they were in junior ranks. This was especially true in the case of the torpedo and gunnery officers who became the elite of the service; such officers had to be convinced that their special qualifications would not unduly weaken their claims to promotion.<sup>21</sup> Further, as the fleet expanded and the pressure on the lower lists became greater, the Admiralty proved reluctant to increase the size of the lists dramatically since such a move would weaken the chances of the average officer to gain promotion and later increase the non-effective charges to the naval estimates. Too rapid promotion and packing the lists full of officers did nothing to ensure that they were employed on a consistent basis. With naval command and technology changing so quickly, the Admiralty and the Cabinet considered it bad for the efficiency of the corps for officers to sit on the beach in the vain hope of employment while taking up space on the active list:

Any system, therefore, which tends to lessen the experience and employment of officers, any system that tends to lay them up like ships in ordinary, is a misfortune as injurious to themselves as it is to

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<sup>21</sup> This argument was used against the elimination of the Master class of officers by Captain John Fulford, who argued that if the masters were in the same career path as the normal executive, their special skills would be lost as soon as they were promoted to more valuable posts. *BPP*, "Copy of the Report of the Admiralty Committee on the Position of Masters in the Royal Navy," vol. XLVII, No. 109 (1866), 183.



the public. And while the object should be kept steadily in view, of affording as frequent employment and as much promotion as the national interests will admit, it should be borne in mind, that though promotion may be the life blood of the service, promotion without employment is the death-warrant of the sailor.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, officers had to be assured of a flow of promotion that did not stagnate to the point where they would lose interest in a naval career and leave the service or, even worse, lose their zeal.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the Admiralty had to regulate the officer lists tightly to ensure a reasonable flow of promotion, to restrain the growth in costs and to ensure the efficiency of the naval service.

The primary target was the highly visible and blatant forms of patronage that thrust officers with no obvious qualifications beyond social and political connections ahead of their fellows. It increasingly became apparent that these promotions, often outside the control of the Admiralty and contrary to ideas of merit or fairness, had to go to the wall. Serving flag officers had the privilege of a haul-down promotion on relinquishing their post; generally the practice was that the flag lieutenant (the admiral's personal assistant) would be promoted to commander. Officers to advance the careers of sons and nephews as well as those of their friends used this privilege.

As late as the 1860s, these promotions were considered normal. In regard to haul-down promotions, the Walpole Committee concluded, "the evidence shows that though

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<sup>22</sup> *BPP*, "Papers relating to the Retirement and Promotion of Naval Officers," vol. XLII, No. 251 (1860), 517.

<sup>23</sup> "Zeal in the Navy," *United Service Magazine*, XXVI (1903), 331. "Most of us are very human; some few are impelled to do their duty in spite of everything, and even at times, and in rare cases, to their own detriment; but in the minds of most of us the EGO [sic] looms very large indeed, and our incentive to work is the reward to be gained. Some strive for pieces of ribbon, and others for pounds, shillings and pence; but the main idea of all is to obtain promotion, and this is their primary incentive to zeal. It follows logically that when promotion is barred, zeal, which at the best is more or less exotic, becomes an attenuated plant."



these promotions have often been conferred on relatives and friends, yet there is no reason to think they are not given to deserving officers.” The committee also put forward the notion that special promotions by overseas commanders-in-chief benefited the service: they were “not merely to be considered as a reasonable compliment to Flag Officers, but as a means of encouraging young officers to so conduct themselves as to deserve the good opinion of those who are placed over them. They are the legitimate patronage of officers in command, and the selections of late years are said to have been very good.”<sup>24</sup>

The elimination of haul-down promotions meant that by 1914 there would be no officers on the active list who had received such promotions to commander. By contrast, in 1899 there were twenty-five officers on the active list who had received such favour; among them Admirals of the Fleet Algernon Lyons and Frederick Richards, and Admirals M. Culme-Seymour, Edmund Fremantle and J.O. Hopkins. In fact, Charles Beresford had received not only a haul-down promotion but also another in consequence of serving in the Royal Yachts.<sup>25</sup> But even promotion in the Royal Yacht Squadron was gradually made solely to officers who had been earmarked previously for advancement.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> BPP, “Report from the Select Committee on Navy Promotion and Retirement,” vol. X, No. 501 (1863), 97, memorandum by Rear Admiral the Earl of Lauderdale

<sup>25</sup> James Bramble, *Promotion and Retirement of Flag Officers of the Royal Navy, 1899* (Portsmouth: Holbrook and Sons, 1899), 25 and 37.

<sup>26</sup> PRO, ADM 116/2080, Half Yearly Promotions, 1920, minute by Winston Churchill, 1912. “The Practice of according special promotion to Officers for services of this character is not desirable ... In this case a pleasant cruise with the added honour of attending Their Majesties had been made the occasion for a reward for a wholly unsuitable purpose and prejudicial to the interests of other Officers doing hard work on regular service.” See also PRO ADM 1/8632/162, “Lieutenant Commander Ralph Neville Recommended for Special Promotion – Suggestion that Royal Yacht Promotion be Discontinued in Future, 1922.”

Promotion of officers became highly regularized and lists were published every June and December according to the vacancies that opened. Furthermore, promotion became more tightly controlled from the centre as officers were instructed for the first time to make regular reports on the performance of subordinates.<sup>27</sup> Although there were concerns that this was tantamount to espionage, officers generally accepted the system. As well, promotion, especially from commander to captain, was increasingly important, since if an officer received sea time as a captain he was virtually guaranteed promotion to rear admiral on the active list. Hence, the First Naval Lord, in addition to regular service records,<sup>28</sup> kept an entry book to track commanders approaching the zone of promotion.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, financial pressures and the possibility of a Great Power conflict, which was taken increasingly seriously from the late 1880s, also conspired to ensure a flow of promotion and a stable and predictable career path for officers. This had the benefit of reducing the blockages of promotion that existed at all levels of the officer establishment, but especially in the lower ranks. A series of actuarial reports and Admiralty committees showed that the issue was not merely numbers. The real problem for these committees was the distribution of officers. Since advancement was considered a primary motivator, they considered it imperative that regular promotions should be somewhat predictable. Indeed, the Childers plan for retiring officers in 1870 put forward a scheme that not only prescribed the number of officers and retirement regulations but also set a mechanism that

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<sup>27</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), G. Noel Papers (NOE) 5/13B, Earl of Selborne to Gerard Noel, 31 March 1903. Selborne asked Noel to establish a confidential evaluation of officers advancing to flag rank.

<sup>28</sup> These records are to be found in PRO, ADM 196.

<sup>29</sup> PRO, ADM 7/929, Confidential Commanders" Book, 1879-, comments in these books varied from Commander Henry Rose being described as "a vg. sailor and a charming gentlemanlike person" to Commander Alfred Warry "zeal – none. Was so inert an officer I could not recommend for advancement."

imposed a certain structure on promotions. Special promotions based on patronage were gradually stopped.

By the turn of the century, a stable career pattern had been laid down and promotions were adjusted to fit certain “zones.” For instance, officers expected that they would serve a minimum of ten years as lieutenants before they could reasonably expect to be made commanders. This predictability of promotion had the added advantage of permitting more officers to take specialist courses and fulfil those special duties before they would start hankering for promotion. This enabled the Admiralty to extract the maximum amount of work from them and to recoup the expensive training and education given to specialists. Generally speaking, the “zone” of promotion was set from approximately ten to fourteen years of seniority. Once an officer passed that point or reached a certain age, his chances for promotion were slim.<sup>30</sup>

Immediately before the war, Winston Churchill, then First Lord began to clamp down on some of the more blatant problems. For instance, he decided to place more stringent rules on the awarding of good service pensions and aide de camps rather than handing them out merely by seniority.<sup>31</sup> The jealousy surrounding these awards was a continual problem; Rear Admiral Doveton Sturdee complained to Captain Alan Everett, the Naval Secretary to the First Lord, that some of his captains had been passed over for these prizes. Frustrated, Everett responded:

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<sup>30</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8370/65 Report on Supply of Officers, April 1912, Table II Highest, Lowest and Average Age Of Officers Promoted to Ranks of Rear Admiral, Captain and Commander, 1894-1911.

<sup>31</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8385/195, Good Service Pensions, Memorandum by Charles Walker, 18 December 1913.

I have been in this office long enough now to become convinced that, since every one person who may be preferred results in at least two others being profoundly discontented, it really be conducive to a happier state of affairs if they abolished all ADC's and GSP's, and most other honours, and confine awards to those only who "deliver the goods."<sup>32</sup>

Promotion to flag rank became problematic for the officer corps as well, since the Royal Navy was unique in that captains progressed to rear admiral on the basis of seniority.<sup>33</sup> Flag rank, even on the retired list, meant a dramatic increase in pay as well as prestige. Retired or even half-pay on the flag list permitted an officer to live well and to be able to take his place in the social and political world if he chose. Although the Admiralty possessed the power to promote any officer, that power had been used only sparingly during the previous century. Considerable pressure was placed on the Admiralty, since the fact that an officer did fairly well as a captain did not necessarily imply that he would be a successful admiral. As early as 1848, it was suggested unsuccessfully that every third flag promotion should be made on the basis of selection.<sup>34</sup> The issue was raised again before the Walpole Committee, where it was firmly rejected because the current system seemed to work and it would cost too much money to compensate captains who were deprived of their chance on the flag list.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> PRO, ADM 116/4600, Aides de Camp and Good Service Pensions: Appointments and Awards to Eligible Officers, 1914-1942; Rear Admiral Alan Everett to Vice Admiral Doveton Sturdee, 30 May 1917.

<sup>33</sup> Subject to qualifying sea time in command of a warship.

<sup>34</sup> BPP, "Report from the Select Committee on Navy Promotion and Retirement," vol. X, No. 501 (1863), 79.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

This issue was brought forth anew during the proceedings of the 1902 Goschen Committee, where it was pointed out that one of the logjams in the system was promotion by seniority. Witnesses consistently argued against it, but as the Report concluded:

Selection would destroy the brotherly feeling amongst Captains which now exists; it might tend to produce jealousies which would hamper the zealous co-operation of Officers in joint operations. It might lessen that spirit of independence, and readiness to express their views without any fear of incurring the displeasure of the authorities, by which they are now animated. It might induce a spirit of self-advertisement and a less generous appreciation of the merits of Officers serving under them.<sup>36</sup>

The most prominent dissenter was Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, a former private secretary to the First Lord, who considered such arguments specious and believed that witnesses before the committee expressed perhaps more concern for the interests of the officer than for the country as a whole:

There is in my judgment nothing in any of the points brought forward except the last; the feeling of loyalty in the Service is far too strong for any tear of jealousy, or for any brotherly feeling to be destroyed, but there is something in the fear that the best men might not always be selected.<sup>37</sup>

Nor was Seymour the only officer to feel this way. Captain Prince Louis of Battenberg wrote to Fisher in the same year: "Now the only one who has the right to be employed is

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<sup>36</sup> PRO, ADM 1/6988, Goschen Report, xv.

<sup>37</sup> PRO, ADM 1/6988, Dissenting Memorandum by Culme-Seymour in Goschen Report, xxx. However, other officers were less confident of assertions of the band of brothers. Charles Dundas, *An Admiral's Yarns: Stray Memories of 50 Years* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1922), 159. "The band of brothers that we have all heard so much about never existed in any fleet that I served in."

the *best man*, and the rights of the second best man can only be considered when the former is incapacitated.”<sup>38</sup>

Just how strongly promotion on the basis of seniority was desired by some, in opposition to Battenberg and Culme-Seymour, was demonstrated over twenty years later when thirty-six captains were forced to retire and thereby deprived of flag rank even on the retired list.<sup>39</sup> One officer “suffered horribly from the commonness of the title Captain” and was required to furnish a reference from a station master when he wished to send milk into London from his farm.

I explained ... that I was not an ordinary Captain, but a Captain, Royal Navy, – but apparently he had been had before by so-called Captains, and instead of a Captain, Royal Navy, being the best possible reference that anyone could give or require, I had to lower myself and – what is much worse – the Service, by giving in and sending him a reference that would carry weight.<sup>40</sup>

Senior officers regarded promotion as a right, even though the Admiralty did not view it as such. Although the principle of promotion to flag rank by seniority remained until after 1945, in reality selection was increasingly employed. The shadow remained, but selection became by force of circumstances the order of the day.

Promotion to flag rang became restricted after 1902, in the first instance because Admiralty officials recognized that just because an officer was promoted did not mean he would be employed on the flag list, since the Admiralty was free to select any officer it

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<sup>38</sup> CCAC, J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR) 1/2/86, Captain Prince Louis of Battenberg to Fisher, 28 July 1902, emphasis in original.

<sup>39</sup> The “Geddes Axe” refers to the dramatic reduction in the Active List pushed forward by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Eric Geddes, at the conclusion of the war. Hundreds of officers were removed from the list in order to reduce government expenditure. See S.W. Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars* (2 vols., New York: Walker and Co., 1968), I, 125.

<sup>40</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8714/175, A Submission by Captains, 1927; experience of Captain “J.”

chose to fill certain appointments. Moreover, the Admiralty possessed the authority to deny promotion to any officer guilty of “ungentlemanly” behaviour or who had refused an appointment. The problem with promotion by seniority was that there was a certain period of time that a rear admiral could occupy a space on the active list before he had been there for a number of years or had reached the age limit. This had a tendency to slow down promotion in the lower ranks and to swell the flag list with officers the Admiralty considered unsuitable for active service.

In the spring of 1914, this situation reached the point where the Admiralty obtained an Order-in-Council that gave it the power to compel officers to retire as they reached the top of the captains’ list.<sup>41</sup> The permanent secretary, a civilian, would inform an officer that he would receive a step in rank if he retired at his own request. Otherwise, he was threatened with being cast out as a captain. Senior captains objected to such letters even though they were forced to accept retirement. These officers were particularly upset over the use of threatening language from a civilian secretary.<sup>42</sup>

In order to save valuable officers, the Admiralty resorted to obtaining special orders-in-council to promote men who had not completed their sea service requirements when they reached the top of the captains’ list. For instance, David Beatty and Rosslyn

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<sup>41</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8370/65, Retirement and Promotion of Officers 1914, Order in Council of March 1914. Further, there was considerable pressure to abolish the “soul-killing” seniority system in favour of promotion. See “Business, R.N.,” *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1917.

<sup>42</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8521/105, Letters of Appreciation for retiring flag officers 1918, Rear Admiral Alan Everett to Oswyn Murray, 2 April 1918; Everett expressed the opinion that officers being compelled to retire should receive a nicer letter than the one commonly circulated: “After all it is rather a wrench leaving the active service after about 35 years and since the individual has reached the top of the Captains’ list he cannot altogether have been a failure. At any rate he has spent his working life for the good of the Country and his conge should be made as graceful as possible.”

Wemyss, both future First Sea Lords and Admirals of the Fleet, were retained on the active list in this fashion.<sup>43</sup>

In essence, although promotion by seniority for flag officers was preserved, the power of the Admiralty was enhanced to the degree that in practice promotion was by selection; the system merely fixed the time at which an officer would be selected for retirement or retention. Even during the war, however, the Admiralty seemed reluctant to interfere with the principle of seniority: a number of captains down the seniority list were appointed to positions normally given to flag officers and were appointed commodores until they reached the top.<sup>44</sup> During the war, the Admiralty began to use acting rank as a way to bypass this problem, much like the Army's brevet system.

## Education

Scientific education based on mathematics was not just an attempt to cram the most information into an officer's head but was intended to teach him to think in a coherent and organized manner.<sup>45</sup> The Admiralty recognized as early as the 1860s that the education of officers had to be placed on a more scientific basis. Again, one of the problems was the conflict between the "practical" and "theoretical" education of cadets. This was rendered particularly problematic by the widely accepted necessity of entering

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<sup>43</sup> PRO, Treasury Papers (T) 1/11192, Admiralty to Treasury, 17 November 1909. The Admiralty attempted to save the career of Beatty; in the cases of Rosslyn Wemyss, Ernest Troubridge and Somerset Calthorpe-Gough, see PRO, ADM 1/8028, Sanctioning Promotion of Certain Officers to Flag Rank, 26 June 1908.

<sup>44</sup> Examples included Reginald Tyrwhitt, William Goodenough and Roger Keyes.

<sup>45</sup> John Knox Laughton, "Scientific Instruction in the Navy," *RUSI*, XXVI (1882), 231.



officers into the service at a young age. The Shadwell Report of 1870 summed up this dilemma:

It follows from this that previous school training of Cadets destined for the Naval Services having much more extended, they must, as a rule, be better grounded in all appertaining to book learning and have received a greater amount of mental training, must be better qualified to enter on more advance studies, and to improve their general and special education. On the other hand the system of entry at an earlier age, which, as a rule, has always been the practice of the British Navy, insures the obtaining a supply of young officers at a time when their minds being docile and plastic and their habits and modes of thought yet unformed they can be more easily inured to the peculiar habits of a sea life, be more accustomed to its unavoidable privations, and occasional hardships, be trained up in attachment to their profession, and be induced to adopt it heartily, as their vocation in life. Early entry into the Service is therefore associated with all the traditions of the Navy, is in accordance with its historic recollections, and is in unison with the general tone of feeling on the subject.<sup>46</sup>

The struggle between these two imperatives dominated the discourse on naval education until after the Second World War, when the service decided to enter officer cadets after they had completed their secondary education. Regardless, such education was imperative as the Rice Committee observed:

Both the habit of accurate reasoning, and the possession, for practical purposes, of considerable scientific attainments, are so important to naval officers, that it is most desirable they should receive, when young, a thorough grounding in those subjects without which a knowledge of the higher mathematics cannot afterwards be acquired.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee on the Higher Education of Naval Officers," vol. XXV, C. 203 (1870), 844. This dilemma was apparent even before the advent of the Britannia system, see Walter Devereux, *Suggestions for Improving the Position of the Officers of the Royal Navy with Some Remarks on the Constitution of the Board of Admiralty* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1855), 5.

<sup>47</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into the System of Training Naval Cadets on Board H.M.S. *Britannia*," vol. XV, C. 1154 (1875), 354-355.

Hence, the committee could not recommend the extension of the *Britannia* course, since it would inordinately delay young men from getting their early sea service. As a result, subjects like History, Grammar, and Literature were eliminated from the examinations, although Latin was retained.<sup>48</sup>

In *Britannia*, out of a total of 35½ hours of instruction a first-term cadet had 10½ hours of instruction per week in mathematics, including 2¼ of arithmetic, three of algebra, 1½ of Euclidean geometry and 3¼ hours of trigonometry (see Table 6.2).<sup>49</sup>

**Table 6.2: Arrangement of Hours H.M.S. *Britannia*, 1875**

Subjects	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Algebra	2	2	4*	4*
Geometry	3	3		
Plane Trig	5	5		
Spherical Trig			6	6
Charts and Instruments			3	3
Physical Geography	2	-	-	-
Astronomy	-	2	-	-
Physical Science	-	-	2	2
Geometric Drawing	1	1	-	-
Steam	-	-	2	2
French	4 1/2	4 ½	3 ½	3 ½
Drawing	3	3	-	-
History Geography and English	3	3	-	-
Seamanship	3 1/2	3 ½	3 ½	3 ½
Optional Studies	-	-	4	4

Source: BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty to Inquire into the System of Training Naval Cadets on Board H.M.S. *Britannia*," vol. XV, C. 1154 (1875), 326; Schedule II Arrangement of Hours.

Notes: In the third and fourth terms this four-course section was split between Algebra, Geometry and Plane Trigonometry.

At the gunnery and torpedo schools, mathematical subjects consumed the bulk of the officers' attention, as Table 6.3 shows.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

**Table 6.3 - Training of Gunnery and Torpedo Lieutenants***H.M.S. Excellent (Gunnery)*

Hour	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
9-12	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
12-1	Chemistry	Physics	Mathematics	Physics	Chemistry	-
2-4	Mathematics	Fortification	-	Fortification	Mathematics	-

*H.M.S. Vernon (Torpedo)*

Hours	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
9-12	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
12-1	Chemistry	Physics	Drawing	Physics	Chemistry	-
2-4	Physics	Chemistry	-	Chemistry	Physics	-

*Source: BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to Inquire into and Report on the Education of Naval Executive Officers," vol. XIII, C. 4885 (1886), 331.*

The Royal Naval College at Greenwich was founded specifically to increase the educational qualifications of officers. As an Admiralty circular declared, "My Lords desire, by the establishment of the College, to give executive officers of the Navy generally, every possible advantage of scientific education; but no arrangement will be made at all prejudicing the all-important practical training in the active duties of their profession."<sup>50</sup> Given the shortcomings of the *Britannia* system and the attempt to teach mathematics and other subjects to midshipmen in the active fleet, it was found by an investigative committee in the 1870s that young officers were not well equipped to pass the difficult examination for lieutenant. Further, it became apparent that the scholastic skills of the acting sub-lieutenants deteriorated in the three years after they left *Britannia*. "It is unsatisfactory that these young officers, after being six years at sea, mostly under naval instructors, and after half-yearly examination on board ship, should have to recover at the College the knowledge which they carried with them when they left the

<sup>50</sup> *BPP*, "Greenwich Hospital (Royal Naval College), Admiralty Minute," vol. XLII, No. 32 (1873), 602.

*Britannia*.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, John Knox Laughton considered that these officers’ grasp of mathematical subjects had reached the desired level before they had entered the service. “... and as a rule they have so utterly forgotten what they have learnt in her [*Britannia*], that it would be difficult to say they ever had learnt anything.”<sup>52</sup>

This was the result of an education system that grasped only the shadow of a mathematical education without the substance. It is tempting to think that the service used this system to give only the appearance of an up-to-date education. In one sense this was true, since it proved difficult to demonstrate to serving senior officers (who trained young officers afloat) that theoretical mathematics was a worthwhile pursuit for officers. Indeed, much depended on the commitment of officers in the ships to support the embarked instructor as well as to ensure that young midshipmen received adequate schoolwork. Some officers were very supportive and permitted the instructor to use his day cabin for instruction, while others thought it more important that their young charges prove themselves by performing the actual duties of an officer. In particular, they believed that midshipmen would learn more by shadowing their superiors in the performance of their duties. Also, small boat work would give them practical experience of command and the responsibility of handling seamen. Midshipmen would often take the cue from their officers in how much effort was put into scholastic work. Sometimes, naval instructors gave up, as Admiral Dundas noted: “He [the Naval Instructor] just let us do as we liked, so we had school in the gunroom. We did about a half an hour’s arithmetic, then decided

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<sup>51</sup> *BPP*, “Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Establishment of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich,” vol. XXI, C. 1733 (1877), 422.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 477; testimony of J.K. Laughton.

that we had had enough, cut for a cocktail all round and close the shop.”<sup>53</sup> Many officers throughout the century that being a schoolboy and an officer at the same time was unsatisfactory frequently pointed it out. Much depended on the instructor, and many young men were at a substantial disadvantage if their schoolwork was not up to standard.

The logical place to begin the professional revolution of the executive officer corps was the elimination of the Master class of officers. Masters were the group originally appointed by warrant to oversee the condition of a vessel and to perform navigational duties in conveying a vessel from one port to another. These men often were highly skilled and by the middle of the nineteenth century had reached gentlemanly status. The Master was also a commissioned officer.

The experience of the Navigation Branch, when combined with the experience of the U.S. Navy in amalgamating engineering and command functions, provided ample precedent for the extension of executive responsibility and the elimination of specialist branches of service. The virtual annexation of the Navigation line into the executive laid the groundwork for the Selborne Scheme of December 1902. Instead of Navigators being semi-executive holdovers from the seventeenth century, lieutenants and commanders (N) would perform their specialist tasks, much like gunnery and torpedo lieutenants.

Originally, the Navigation specialization was performed by the Master branch, which was a warrant rather than a commissioned rank. There was also an incongruous situation where masters were held equally responsible with the vessel's captain for the loss of or damage to ships running aground or in collision with other vessels. Various courts martial throughout the nineteenth century bear this out. While the Master class of

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<sup>53</sup> Dundas, *An Admiral's Yarn*, 53.

warrant officers bore a great responsibility, they had no power and were inferior even to the most junior lieutenant, regardless of their experience or abilities. Also, there were precious few promotions to be won and little provision for retirement. Senior officers expressed much concern that officers relied too heavily on their masters due to imperfect knowledge of navigation and pilotage, and there were cases where commanding officers refused to put to sea in the absence of the master.<sup>54</sup>

The Admiralty decided as a result of a committee report to abolish the specialist Navigation line; remaining officers would be granted naval ranks prefixed by the term “staff” (hence staff commander) until they gradually retired. This was done to reassure officers that these men, though of executive rank, were no threat to their career prospects and that such officers (staff commanders) were definitely subordinate to every officer of the rank of lieutenant and above, even though they were eligible for command. As Admiral W.F. Martin wrote in 1866:

Nevertheless the other executive officers will indeed have a genuine grievance to complain of, if the two branches should be amalgamated. The additional competitors for the few prizes, for which they have been encouraged to hope, will swamp them. No more Admirals and Captains would be wanted; yet the ranks they rise from would be greatly increased in numbers. Of course promotions may be made to bear any ratio to admissions to the Service; but occupations and commands are limited... The pretensions therefore of the Masters are not only without foundations, but with regard to other officers their injustice is transparent and extravagant.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> BPP, “Navy Officers and Seamen – Remarks on Mr. W.S. Lindsay’s paper by Rear Admiral B.J. Sullivan,” vol. XLIV, No. 238 (1870), 706.

<sup>55</sup> W.F. Martin, *Respecting the Abolition of the Masters as a Class of Officers in the Navy* (London: William Ridgeway, 1866), 12-13.

Another argument that was put forward asserted that since this function required specialized skill, it was best to have senior officers perform it. The problem with the best and brightest regular lieutenants was that they were seeking promotion so quickly after gaining their commission.<sup>56</sup>

Another argument frequently made was that by eliminating this branch, honourable employment would be denied for those whose means did not permit them to enter the quarterdeck in a regular fashion.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, similar arguments were often heard regarding the Selborne Scheme nearly forty years later. However, the real reason for the proposed amalgamation was a deeply held concern that regular line officers were not as familiar with the duties associated with conning and navigating a ship. Further, if the professional duties of an executive officer included seamanship, then such an officer should be able to perform this duty. The Eliot Report of 1866 concluded that:

We would remark that an opinion prevails that the system of entrusting the navigation and pilotage of H.M. ships to a separate class is apt in some degree, to engender indifference or inattention to those particular duties in the lieutenants and other officers of the main executive branch... The usual argument in favour of the change is, that by throwing the work and responsibility of navigation and piloting on the lieutenants and other officers of that branch of service, a more general acquaintance with these special duties would be imparted to those who may subsequently be called upon to command H.M. ships, and that captains would become more apt and practised in those duties than they are at present.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *BPP*, "Copy of the Report of the Admiralty Committee on the Position of Masters in the Royal Navy," vol. XLVII, No. 109 (1866), 183, minutes of evidence of Captain John Fulford.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

The establishment of this line of specialist officers leaves us with some unanswered questions. Why was it so much simpler and painless to turn masters into line officers when twenty-five years later it was so much more difficult to afford similar treatment to engineers? First, there was a fundamental difference in role of the two. Navigating officers were deck officers, which meant that their duties, such as seamanship and ship handling, were intertwined with the primary qualification of a commanding officer. Navigators could be executive specialists and still retain the “eye” of a seaman and the practical aspects of command at sea. Indeed, after abolition ex-Masters were still commanding despatch and auxiliary vessels. Second, the Masters’ claims for improvement entailed no upheaval in the paradigm of naval command. Navigation duties could readily be seen as part and parcel of the duties of line officers and posed no threat to the warrior ethic since it could not be demonstrated that navigators intended to replace the executive line. Third, and most important, there was no great external pressure placed on the Admiralty by lobby groups aimed at the improvement of navigators. This was entirely the opposite of the situation with the engineers. By the 1890s well funded, powerful engineering societies advocated the cause of naval engineers as a way of furthering the cause of the entire profession.

Still, it is important to recognize that the abolition of the Navigation line was regretted by elements within the Navy. Captain C.C.P. Fitzgerald systematically attacked the abolition and set about to demolish the arguments put forward by the Eliot Committee during a RUSI lecture in 1901. Countering the argument about the lack of opportunity for high command by the navigators, Fitzgerald argued “[i]t seems ridiculous therefore to call



it a hardship that a man could not win a prize which was never offered to him.”<sup>59</sup> Fitzgerald’s comments, however, were equally directed at engineers, as he attempted to deconstruct the reasons for the elimination of the old Master class. The year 1901 marked the height of agitation for revising the terms of service for engineering officers. By effectively destroying the precedent, Fitzgerald sought to place a well-directed hole in the arguments of the agitators.

The ultimate expression of this trend was the introduction of the new training scheme in December 1902 in the House of Lords by the First Lord of the Admiralty. Cadets intended for the three combat arms of the Royal Navy would enter through the same process and be trained together until they specialized as commissioned lieutenants. Prior to 1902, officers for all three branches entered separately. Executives passed through *Britannia* at the age of thirteen or fourteen and then went to sea, while engineers entered at a later age and passed through the Royal Naval Engineering College at Keyham in Devonport and Marine officers entered later still and were raised like army officers after they had had received a full public school education. Cadets intended for all three branches would receive a nomination from a selection committee at the age of twelve or thirteen and then try a qualifying examination that would ensure that their education had been sufficient. All would then proceed to the new Royal Naval College at Osborne on the Isle of Wight for a two-year course, followed by two more years of instruction at the new college at Dartmouth that replaced the old *Britannia*.

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<sup>59</sup>C.C.P. Fitzgerald, “The Re-establishment of a Separate Navigation Line in the Royal Navy,” *RUSI*, XXXV (October 1901), 1069.

The problem of integrating engineering into the Royal Navy had been vexing, and it became increasingly so as the prominence and size of that department increased dramatically. Various attempts were made by the Admiralty to improve the stature and education of these officers, such as the Cooper Key Committee of 1877 that had attempted to ensure that future commissioned officers in this branch would indeed be gentlemen. Moreover, the advent of Engine Room Artificers (E.R.A.) as a warrant rank during this period limited the growth of commissioned officers and permitted those who were left to have greater status. Nonetheless, agitation for the improvement of the stature of these officers had increased to such a level that Fisher and his allies realized that a reorientation was required. In this light it is possible to argue Fisher's scheme was not revolutionary at all since it merely accomplished what the officer corps had been moving toward for the previous forty years. Not only would executive officers be technically proficient in the manipulation of weapons and ships, but the same body of officers would effectively run the entire ship from keelson to topmast with no other profession to stand in its way.

The executive and the gradual extinction of an entire class of officer had bought off the engineer agitation with the annexation of engineering functions. The old scheme entries would be phased out by 1907-1908. As one writer put it:

One of the most remarkable feature of the engineer agitation – which by-the-by, has led to the new regulations – seems to have escaped the attention of the critics, viz. that the engineers have committed hari-kari! They and their friends on shore have succeeded in practically debarring their class from entering the navy as officers, they can now only enter as ERAs with the off-chance of becoming officers...<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Watchman, "The New Admiralty Scheme," *The Naval and Military Record*, 2 April 1903, 2; see also, Carylton Bellairs, "The New Naval Scheme," *Brassey's Naval Annual* (1903), 188-189.

As the author of the scheme, Fisher thought that future engineering would be greatly simplified because turbines and oil would lessen the size of engine-room complements and leave the executive in command of the entire field:

...believe me, there is not half so much required to be a good engineer as to be a good gunnery or Torpedo Lieutenant. A fellow who can put together all the mechanism of a Whitehead Torpedo and manipulate all the intricacies of modern gun arrangements involving the highest practical and technical knowledge will find it simply child's play to manipulate engines and boilers of any ship in the Navy!<sup>61</sup>

But even from the advent of scientific education in the service there was disquiet about its implications and considerable back-peddalling over “theoretical” education. Four years after the founding of the Royal Navy College in 1877, the Gordon Committee postulated:

But it must be remembered that to a large class of minds mathematical or analytic reasoning is entirely foreign. The use of the higher mathematics, especially, as a tool is never thoroughly grasped by them – never grasped in a form to be afterwards applied. Such minds are deficient in that power of abstract reasoning which the use of mathematical symbols implies, or they cannot attain any facility in their manipulation. Now, it must be admitted that the technical duties of a seaman and of a naval officer – if we leave out of consideration the more abstruse problems connected with nautical astronomy, navigation, shipbuilding, and gunnery, with which comparatively few naval officers can ever be called upon to deal – necessitate but a limited knowledge of mathematics, and that an intelligent apprehension of the principles on which the technical rules of the

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<sup>61</sup> CCAC, Bryan Godfrey-Faussett Papers (BGGF) 2/3, Fisher to Godfrey-Faussett, 19 January 1903. Godfrey-Faussett was closely connected to the Prince of Wales and was used as a contact by Fisher to put his views across to the heir to the throne. See also D.K. Brown, *The Grand Fleet: Warship Design and Development, 1906-1922* (London: Chatham, 1999), 22. It was found in 1908 that a destroyer equipped with oil fired boilers not only offered cheaper, more powerful and more efficient power but also halved the complements of engine rooms. While the coal fired *Beagle* was crewed with fifty-eight officers and men in the engineering department, the *Defender* required only twenty-four.

profession are founded may be obtained with a good knowledge of arithmetic, and the elements of algebra, geometry, and trigonometry.<sup>62</sup>

The more the naval officer corps went down the road of technical education and training, the more disquiet was engendered among officers. Although such concerns have been used as evidence of the reactionary nature of the corps, this has been distorted. Indeed, the officer corps was merely reflecting middle- and upper class concerns over whether a reliance on machinery and mechanical models could solve human problems. Military organizations were particularly vulnerable to this sort of thinking because of their reliance on the personal element and leadership in battle. From the time steam power and industrial processes first came to the Navy, the executive was chary about its implications. In particular, there was a strong reaction against the specializations. Admiral Kenneth Dewar argued: "Gunnery is essentially a practical and common-sense subject, but specialization had created vested interests and erected barriers between it and the rest of the Service. The gunnery schools surrounded it with a thorny zariba of theory and useless learning which the non-specialist could only surmount by a long and arduous process of initiation."<sup>63</sup>

This disquiet was further exposed by the loud protests over the Selborne Scheme and the extension of the privileges of engineering specialists after the Douglas Report of 1905. The most prominent criticism put forward in regard to the Scheme was over the lengthening of the education courses and the increased focus on engineering work in the

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<sup>62</sup> BPP, "Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Establishment of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich," vol. XXI, C. 1733 (1877), 436.

<sup>63</sup> Dewar, *The Navy from Within*, 58.

colleges. Reactionaries and relatively professional individuals alike argued that the new Scheme was wrong in continuing to cram “useless” theory into the already over-stuffed brains of cadets. Moreover, contrasts were often drawn between those young men who had been trained in masts and sails and those who sought their experience between the pages of a book. Since the naval profession could not, in their view, be reduced to a mathematical formula, further attempts would not lead to greater efficiency.

Indeed, the attempt to create a jack-of-all-trades was the problem, and many commentators thought it good if all future cadets were geniuses. The reality, however, was that they were not. Commander Reginald Plunkett in the first number of *The Naval Review* summed the difficulty.

We need to produce, if possible, an almost Napoleonic type in which character and intellect are both trained and developed to the highest degree. But the difficulty is this, that character and intellect require totally different training, and the development of one, at all events as done in the present day, is often detrimental to the other. At one end of the scale you get, say, the Rugby international, to whom the art of war and quadratic equations are equally abhorrent; a good fighting man, but intellectually undeveloped. At the other end of the scale you get the eminent professor, who is an expert in differential calculus, but perhaps has no more character than a sheep.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, a mind crammed with facts that had been shaped by rote was less efficient than a mind that had not been so stuffed.<sup>65</sup> Another commentator argued, “Slowly, but surely, a spirit of critical intelligence is arising that demands better direction, less lost time and motion, greater work economy.”<sup>66</sup> Another noted “[t]here is also the

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<sup>64</sup> R. Plunkett, “Naval Education,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 26-27.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, “The Training of Naval Officers,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 313.

insidious and well-known danger, that continuous work with machinery and material militates against the development of certain faculties which are essential for command.”<sup>67</sup>

A third opined that “[t]he last generation set up a system of psuedo-scientific education as the great cure-all, this generation pins its faith to engineering and comforts itself with the shibboleth that every officer must be an engineer.”<sup>68</sup>

As we have seen, the officer corps gradually moved toward the modern conception of professionalism with selection, promotion and education based on visible qualifications. A stable career pattern based on stages of training and qualification had been put forward, and the basis of promotion had undergone a revolution. Officers could now generally expect to serve a dozen or so years as lieutenants before advancement, and specific duties were closely associated with promotion. Examining officer records that increasingly included items such as inventions and technical innovations can see that specialist training and special skills were highly regarded.<sup>69</sup>

The greater the technical advance of the industrialized Navy, the greater the depth and attention of executive officers. Performance on examinations and excellence in routine functions became of paramount importance. There seemed to be less and less room for independence of character and thought as officers conformed to the same set of assumptions and the same criteria to obtain advancement.

However, there was considerable uncertainty about and suspicion of “theory,” and the corps seemed unwilling to buy into the notion of technical education. The result was a

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<sup>67</sup> “Letter to the Editor: The Training of Naval Officers,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 281.

<sup>68</sup> Dewar, “The Training of Naval Officers,” 306.

<sup>69</sup> PRO, ADM 196/45, Service Record of Admiral Sir Reginald Drax.

mixture of systems that did neither very satisfactorily. For all the attention lavished on the idea of individual character and practical experience, Andrew Gordon showed that most officers seemed satisfied with mechanistic patterns and felt constrained from asking too many difficult questions.<sup>70</sup> Even with the advent of modern history, as we will see in the next chapter, officers were not convinced.

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<sup>70</sup> Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996), 595-596.

## Chapter VII

### History as a Tool for Control

It is now accepted with naval and military men who study their profession that history supplies the raw materials from which they are to draw their lessons, and reach the working conclusions. Its teachings are not, indeed, pedantic precedents; but they are the illustrations of living principles. Alfred Thayer Mahan<sup>1</sup>

A man cannot get on without his heart, but we do not dethrone the brain from its functions of thinking and planning, will and volition, nor is it likely that we are going to undermine the directive power of the navy because the heart of a ship is mechanism.<sup>2</sup>

History, as we are well aware, often serves to reinforce existing forms of social power. Longevity of institutions and their “historic” place in a community are frequently sufficient to secure continued existence despite social and political change. The survival of monarchies, which have outlived their original political function in Europe and elsewhere, are cases in point. Further, the historical record can be distorted to blend history and mythology to provide legitimacy for institutions and the continued status and authority of social groups. While a deliberate falsification of the record is easily detected, the subtle influence of power still plays a dominant role in prioritizing fields investigated and deeming what is worthy of being evaluated. On the surface, the “scientific” history of the nineteenth century asserted its adherence to objective truth, but self-imposed limitations on the avenues of inquiry narrowed the focus and served the interests of entrenched political and social power.

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<sup>1</sup> A.T. Mahan, *From Sail to Steam: Recollections of Naval Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1907), 282.

<sup>2</sup> Carylton Bellairs, “The Navy and the Engineer,” *Monthly Review*, VII (June 1902), 37.



As it developed at the end of the nineteenth century, its practitioners deliberately placed naval history as a servant of the existing social and political arrangements with the Royal Navy. By asserting its search for historical “principles” and by making claims of objectivity in the examination of past conflicts, it reinforced the power of the executive elite. The power of command and the authority of the commander were emphasized by asserting the vital importance of decisive battle and claiming that the very existence of the state might depend on the throw of metaphorical dice on the day of Armageddon. Moreover, this history focussed on the power of the state and the importance of policy. As Commander Alfred C. Dewar argued:

[i]t is the function then of naval and military history to emphasize that he will not have an opportunity of testing his theories unless he remains master in his own house. Schleswig-Holstein was averse to militarism and now supplies soldiers to fight for the militarists of Prussia. The war history of a nation is an essential part of its education...<sup>3</sup>

All other factors and personnel were to be strictly subordinated to the will of the commander, thus enhancing the social and political power of the executive branch as the only segment of the Navy competent to carry out those functions. As Dewar argued in 1917, “[t]he object of history should be in the first place to assist the statesman and the departments of state. In another aspect, naval history is the station bill of the navy.”<sup>4</sup> History, as the Navy’s station bill, told everyone that their position was subordinate to the commander.

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<sup>3</sup> A.C. Dewar, *The Significance of Naval History* (Ramsgate: S.R. Wilson, 1916), 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Board of Education Papers (ED) 12/305, A.C. Dewar, “On Certain Aspects of Organisation” (1917), 18-19; see also, National Maritime Museum (NMM), K.G.B. Dewar Papers (DEW) 4/ Pt II, Lecture on Historical Method, 6 June 1919.

Moreover, this “scientific” history gave legitimacy to the power and position of the executive in its claims to leadership by demonstrating that such assertions had an “objective” foundation. Since arguments for executive dominance based on traditional seamanship, class or social position were increasingly insecure, a scientific basis for command was most welcome. At the same time, this “scientific” approach allowed conceptual space for the intangibles of character and the spiritual aspect of command.<sup>5</sup> The result was the best of both worlds: the authority of the executive was enhanced, and yet the freedom of initiative and the intangible aspects of personal character were not diminished. History as both a science and an art was an immensely powerful tool to reinforce existing social relationships within the service and to assert the legitimacy of the line officer corps in its continued dominance of the naval establishment.

As a subsidiary aspect, this history was used to educate younger officers not only to acquire the power of command but also to reinforce their self-confidence in an age of profound social and technological change. The best example of this can be seen clearly in Jon Sumida’s recent analysis of the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan, where Sumida effectively demonstrates the importance Mahan placed on combining art and science to educate future officers for the United States Navy.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that reinforcing these traditional values in a coherent and intellectually respectable fashion would confirm the leadership of the corps and ensure its legitimacy in the wider world. Indeed, this modern

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred T. Mahan, “The Writing of History,” *Atlantic Monthly*, XCI (March 1903), 289. Indeed, Mahan draws close comparisons of the moral imperatives of religion with the construction of historical principles. “To communicate to others that which one’s self has acquired, be it much or little, be it money or any other form of human possession, is not only a power, but a *duty*.”

<sup>6</sup> Jon Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). See also, Mahan, “Writing of History,” 292-293.

approach was especially important when such officers were required to interact with other government departments. Through the agency of history, officers were to be trained to hold their own as professional sea officers and to learn to attack contemporary problems coherently and consistently. As the naval officer and historian Captain Herbert Richmond wrote in a private letter, "I have no desire to make Historians of Naval Officers; but I have every desire that Naval Officers should be capable of using history in an intelligent manner, understanding how to analyse it, what is applicable and what is not. Mere archaeological history is of no interest to me."<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, "objective" history and expounding the principles of command could be, and often were, regarded as threats to the independence of individual senior officers because their conduct, whether on manoeuvres or in actual operations, would be exposed to criticism not merely by their seniors but also by a collection of comparatively junior and highly educated officers who lacked the experience or rank to fill positions of high command themselves.<sup>8</sup> The problem was that there were many officers and civilians who took the Navy's interest in scientific investigations of the past seriously and went in directions that were distinctly uncomfortable. Moreover, this approach opened the

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<sup>7</sup> NMM, DEW 34/, Richmond to Dewar, 10 January 1911. See also C.R. Markham, "On the Advantage of Forming Collections at Greenwich with a View to Supplying the Means of Studying the Origin and Gradual Development of Various Branches of Naval Science," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XXXV (1891), 281. "The faculty of imagination, more or less developed, and more or less cultivated, exists in the mind of almost every human being. There can be no wisdom in neglecting or ignoring it. In the education of a naval Officer it is serviceable in assimilating the teachings of naval history. It not only arouses feelings of emulation, and of love for a noble profession, it also excites a thirst for knowledge which will not fail to seek satisfaction by study, but which can never be quenched."

<sup>8</sup> PRO, Admiralty Papers (ADM) 203/69, Indeed, Captain E. Astley-Rushton warned budding staff officers to beware of how they disagreed with their chief. "We are very careful to make the point that too frequent disagreement means loss of influence. Everyone tires of the man who is always taking the opposite view." Also, W.C.H. Snell, "A Few Remarks on Naval Strategy," *RUSI*, XXXI (1887), 57. Lieutenant Snell was very careful to assuage those who "will consider it presumptuous for an Officer of my standing to write on a subject so important."

possibility of criticism by junior officers through the press or in the pages of *The Naval Review* after its founding in 1913; it also laid the foundations of the naval war staff in the Admiralty that would centralize command, training and doctrine. The most extreme forms of staff advocacy were the schemes advanced by the Dewar brothers, Kenneth and Alfred, which would threaten to reduce command to a form of “scientific management” comparable to that of large industrial enterprises.<sup>9</sup>

### Historical Principles

They think of me as a historian only, and don't know my views, nor why I study History. They can't see that I use it as a means of learning something about strategy, and not as an end itself – in fact, that I am very adverse from *teaching* History, but want it studied as a mental gymnastic...<sup>10</sup> - Rear Admiral Herbert Richmond

Extracting lessons from history was not a new idea. Indeed, Roman historians had illustrated the importance of ideals through studying the history of the Republic. The ancient Hebrews were admonished through the scriptures to recognize the vital importance of their relationship to Jehovah. In Renaissance Florence, Machiavelli deduced principles from the past to compile a treatise for rulers. And in sixteenth-century Italy Montecouli devised a way to deduce principles of military conduct that would

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<sup>9</sup> PRO, ED 12/305, “On Certain Aspects of Organisation.” See also K.G.B. Dewar, “Executive Command and Staff in Naval Warfare,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 40; “The principles of modern military command are of the greatest importance to naval officers, because they are equally applicable to their own service. In preparing for anything so uncertain as war on the sea, a great deal of work and energy must always be misdirected, and anything that reduces wastage and misapplication, increases the amount of useful work to a far greater extent than anything that merely adds to the stock of existing energy.” See also A.C. Dewar, “The Re-organisation of the Naval Staff, 1917-1919” *Naval Review*, IX (1921), 185.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 359.

ensure that those who commanded military forces would have a deeper understanding of the nature of war.<sup>11</sup>

What was different about the historical principles of the late nineteenth century was their marriage to positivist science and the argument that such principles were valid regardless of time and place. The unique nature of historical events and their context became irrelevant to the men who devised military strategy: history ironically became ahistorical in order to serve the ends of military and naval leadership. Alexander the Great, Horatio Nelson, Stonewall Jackson or Lord Kitchener could be compared without considering the changing circumstances of over two thousand years. Hence, Mahan did not bother to attempt to deal with naval warfare before 1660, and Colomb dismissed pre-seventeenth century seaborne warfare as mere “cross-ravaging” that was not naval at all.<sup>12</sup> Since history was intended to provide lessons for the modern warrior, there was little concern with understanding the limitations of administrative capacity or any cultural constraints that limited the choices available to pre-modern leaders.

Naval history thus focussed increasingly on the importance of the decisive battle because that was where the “principles of war” were most obvious. The importance of concentrating force at a decisive point; the centrality of the offensive; the imperative of securing lines of communication; and the necessity of having clear objectives were all illustrated through studying battles. A cursory reading of Mahan, combined with a lack of thought about naval war, convinced officers that naval preparations and staff work were

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<sup>11</sup> Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15-26.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (1890, New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 90; and P.H. Colomb, *Naval Warfare: Its Ruling Principles and Practice Historically Treated* (1891, 2 vols., Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), I, 22.

mere clerical functions that were necessary only to prepare the ground for the entrance of the “great man.” In the Royal Navy, what staff system existed before 1912 merely collated information from the Intelligence Department and the Mobilization Division. Once the fleet had been mobilized and dispatched, no one was quite sure what to do with it.<sup>13</sup> As Fisher wrote in 1902: “*For fear of our plans leaking out, we make no plans at all!*” (That’s the plain truth!) ‘*Wait till the time comes*’ is the motto, and the ‘*time will come*’ (like the Day of Judgment!) all of a sudden, and there will be no time then for repentance or anything else!”<sup>14</sup> Further, performance on the field of battle emphasized the aspects of command that fit in well with the traditional claims of officers that the spiritual and intangible dimensions were what mattered. If the goal of naval power was, as Sir Reginald Custance believed, to overthrow the power of the enemy through battle, the importance of the command element was maintained and extended.<sup>15</sup>

The principles of war legitimized the executive branch by reassuring the general public that naval officers grasped the essential nature of their profession and were fit to lead the naval establishment. This was particularly important in Britain around the turn of the century. In the final quarter of the century it became readily apparent that Britain had lost its commanding lead as the foremost industrial power. Moreover, the “new imperialism” in the 1880s was characterized both by a dramatic increase in the naval

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<sup>13</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 92. In discussion with Richmond, Churchill said that “[n]ow that we have our war, the next thing is to decide how we are going to carry it on.”

<sup>14</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR) 1/3/95, Fisher to Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, 16 March 1902.

<sup>15</sup> Reginald Custance, *War at Sea: Modern Theory and Ancient Practice* (London: Blackwoods, 1918), 3; “The end or military aim is primarily to destroy, or to disarm, or to neutralise the action of the enemy’s armed force, whether on land, at sea, or in the air.”

strength of other significant powers and overseas imperial expansion of countries as diverse as the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and Belgium. All these nations save the latter built powerful navies that were potential strategic threats to British communications and commerce, if not to the home islands themselves. Maintaining the larger fleet after the passage of the Naval Defence Act increased the level of funding for the Royal Navy and expectations about its performance. Periodic war scares emphasized that the traditional doctrine of the Navy might not be enough to preserve the independence of the United Kingdom. As early as the 1840s politicians and publicists was argued that the battle fleet was no longer a sufficient strategic defence of the home islands once steam bridged the channel and led to the construction of vastly expensive fortifications around the coast.<sup>16</sup> In addition, novels and serials routinely dealt with overseas invasions. One was Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands*, in which yachtsmen accidentally stumbled across a German invasion fleet preparing to assault Britain.<sup>17</sup> In essence, a doctrine (or at least a justification) had to be developed to reassure the public that naval defence was the same as it had always been.

Historically derived strategic principles of the kind postulated by A.T. Mahan, P.H. Colomb and Julian Corbett provided a partial antidote to such pressures. Claiming that strategic principles derived from historical study were immutable and eternal, they attacked the pre-occupation with technologies that appeared to threaten the very basis of naval power. The advent of mines, torpedoes and submarines threatened the

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<sup>16</sup> Donald M. Schurman, *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 17-19.

<sup>17</sup> Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service Recently Achieved* (1903; reprint, New York: David McKay Co., 1977).

comparatively vulnerable capital ship.<sup>18</sup> In particular, British battleships with slow-firing heavy guns were easy targets for the fast and handy torpedo boat. Steam-powered fleets, while no longer at the mercy of the wind, were now more heavily dependent on a ready supply of coal and other supplies. Wireless and cable telegraphy overturned many of the older command arrangements. In other words, history, at least on the surface, had few lessons to teach naval officers because the operation of fleets and the function of officers had undergone such rapid and irreversible transformations. As Fisher wrote to Joseph Chamberlain in 1900:

As regards the naval war, "history is a record of exploded ideas," because steam and wireless telegraphy have changed all the conditions... The central episode of the greatest naval battle ever fought was that of Nelson in the very climax of Trafalgar... He was walking up and down the quarterdeck of the *Victory* having a yarn with his Captain! He had got his ships alongside those of the enemy and nothing more to do, and then it became the sailors' battle, but now it's the Admiral's battle. All is worked from the conning tower. You press a button and off go the torpedoes. Another electrical signal fires the guns and third works the engines, and so on, and the sailors know but little of what is going to happen next, and therefore the "teachings of history" have no value for us...<sup>19</sup>

Even Alfred Thayer Mahan when he began his famous *Influence* series wondered about the possible uses of naval history to modern officers:

When I was first asked to lecture on Naval History at our War College, I proposed to myself at once the question, 'How shall I make the experience of wooden sailing ships, with their pop-guns useful in the naval present?' The first reply was: 'By showing the tremendous

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<sup>18</sup> See, James Goldrick, "The Problems of Modern Naval History," in John B. Hattendorf (ed.), *Doing Naval History: Essays Toward Improvement* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (3 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), II, 165, Fisher to Joseph Chamberlain, 10 November 1900. See also, CCAC, M.P.A. Hankey Papers (HNKY) 4/7, Viscount Esher to Hankey, 15 March 1915.



influence Naval Power, under whatever form, has exerted upon the Course of History;' the second, as I went on with my studies was: 'By showing that the leading principles of war received illustration in the old naval experience, just as they did in land warfare under all its various phases during the past twenty-five centuries.'<sup>20</sup>

The study of history was thus a way of imposing order on the changed circumstances and of regulating and controlling policy. Further, it asserted that technological determinism could not be an effective basis for naval power and that policy had to conform to political and strategic needs. These principles of war continue to have currency even in the modern world; indeed, the works of Corbett and Colomb are still in print and have inspired a spate of contemporary treatises on naval strategy that are still rooted in history.<sup>21</sup>

What was the nature of these principles of war? They were held to be of universal application, and commentators such as Colomb went so far as to describe them as "immutable laws."<sup>22</sup> Yet many officers were distinctly uncomfortable with the word "law" because it tended to reduce the importance of human judgement and because the intellectual exercise of thinking through the application of principles was their crucial contribution. Historical study and imagination were to be disciplined by thinking through the various situations with which past commanders were faced. Using the case method as

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Seager and Doris Maguire (eds.), *The Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan* (3 vols., Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1975), II, 9; Mahan to W.H. Henderson, 5 May 1890.

<sup>21</sup> For an example, see Wayne Hughes, *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986); and James F. Dunnigan, *How to Make War: A Comprehensive Guide to Modern Warfare for the Post-Cold War Era* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, New York: William Morrow & Co., 1993), 16-21; and Colin Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Colomb, *Naval Warfare*, I, 39.

advocated by the German staff school system (and modern business schools), the officer would learn to apply principles of action instinctively and to use his judgement confidently in stressful and urgent situations.<sup>23</sup> In other words, commonplace phrases like “concentration of force,” “security” and “economy of force” were not to be memorized or become dogma that would compel officers to conform rigidly to clockwork actions. To do so, officers such as Herbert Richmond argued, was the great mistake of the eighteenth century, when the Fighting Instructions had imposed a tactical straight-jacket on British admirals which led to indecisive actions in the great wars against the French.<sup>24</sup> “Those who view tactics as a kind of glorified target practice, in which they have merely to follow the track of the next ahead, suffer from a lack of imagination. Their stereotyped plans will be quickly paralysed by the insistent and violent threat of death, and they will be very liable to rout and panic on realising their mistake and consequent lack of training.”<sup>25</sup>

Historical principles, then, were not useful exclusively to the commander-in-chief or to the admiral commanding a fleet. Instead, it was useful for all executive officers to have a grasp of strategy and tactics to enable them to use their own *professional* judgement in situations where obeying orders would be detrimental and there was no time to consult higher authority. Training in judgement and initiative was to provide a more effective substitute for the loss of sail training that supposedly ingrained independence of

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<sup>23</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, “Executive Command and Staff in Naval Warfare – I,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 36-37.

<sup>24</sup> Dewar, *Significance of Naval History*. In more recent years, this judgement has been subjected to considerable revision; see John Creswell, *British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century: Tactics in Battle* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972); and N.A.M. Rodger, “Image and Reality in Eighteenth-Century Naval Tactics,” *Mariner’s Mirror*, LXXXIX, No. 3 (2003), 280-296.

<sup>25</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, “Executive Command and Staff in Naval Warfare – III,” *Naval Review*, II (1914), 2.

action and quickness of resource. In this way it represented a great advance over the previous preoccupation with mundane ship management. This training also was intended by leading reformist officers and their allies to be for every executive officer. Each officer would be able to exercise his own initiative, while those unfit to do so would be sidelined. What was intended was a form of “orderly chaos” where judgement would conform to certain norms and expectations but would not unduly deprive the officer of bounded initiative. In other words, the principles that derived from history would gel into doctrine that would animate the entire executive branch but not tie it to a few “buzz” words that were imperfectly understood.<sup>26</sup>

History and derived principles were effectively encapsulated in Corbett’s *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* and its precursor, the so-called “Green Pamphlet.” Relying on his vast historical knowledge, Corbett stripped maritime warfare to its theoretical foundations by exploring the various methods to achieve strategic goals through the use of naval power. Moreover, he provided the language of command to British policy makers and officers and defined that lexicon in a coherent fashion. Terms such as “major and minor strategy” and “concentration of force” were all reconsidered. This re-examination forced officers to rethink the aphorisms that appeared to be based on nothing more than analogies to the experience of a foxhunt or the parade ground.<sup>27</sup>

Historical study, as we have seen above, was not undertaken for its own sake but was to serve professional goals that not only would make the officer corps more effective

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<sup>26</sup> Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (1911, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), xxix; and Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 48–49.

<sup>27</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/12, Churchill to H.H. Asquith, 15 August 1913.

and efficient but also remove doubt about the professional competence of naval officers.

In his attempt to cajole officers into a consideration of the use of strategic theory in the execution of their duties, Corbett wrote:

The truth is that the mistrust of theory arises from a misconception of what it is that theory claims to do. It does not pretend to give the power of conduct in the field; it claims no more than to increase the effective power of conduct. Its main practical value is that it can assist a capable man to acquire a broad outlook whereby he may be the surer his plan shall cover all the ground, and whereby he may with greater rapidity and certainty seize all the factors of a sudden situation.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, the purpose of such study was to enhance the power of command and to ensure that the professional task of the officer corps – the planning and execution of war plans – was performed in the most effective fashion. These principles, when combined, digested and organized into strategic and tactical doctrine (NOT dogma), would enable the officer corps to act as a single community animated with the same spirit as Nelson and his band of brothers. Although officers like Custance were suspicious of doctrine imposed from above (especially one that seemed to eschew battle, as did Corbett's), others regarded it as necessary as long as checks were introduced to encourage officers to think through the issues.<sup>29</sup>

Also, since military decisions were required to be much more rapid and often could be based only on a partial view of the situation, historically-minded officers considered it imperative that certain operational “rules” were followed to ensure the

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<sup>28</sup> Corbett, *Some Principles*, 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> PRO, Cabinet Papers (CAB) 1/31, part III, “Remarks on the Report of Admiral Slade’s Committee on the War College,” 1913. Custance argued, “But what if the thought is not sound? In that case will not the College prepare defeat rather than victory?”

accomplishment of the strategic object. Since this was the case, and since many situations could not be easily corrected once a decision had been made, A.C. Dewar argued:

Great stress is therefore placed on the word of command and on authority, not because officers are obsessed with the idea of discipline, but because discipline is necessary in times of crisis and in war. This tradition of the importance of smartness and of authority (a tradition essential to the highest human efficiency whether in peace or war) is nursed in the fighting services because it is essential to success in war.<sup>30</sup>

Standardized doctrine also served to ensure that the attention of the high command was directed toward issues in proportion to their importance. The best use was to be made of both men and materiel. “In preparing for anything so uncertain as war on the sea, a great deal of work and energy must always be misdirected, and anything which reduces wastage and misapplication, increases the amount of useful work to a far greater extent than anything which merely adds to the stock of existing energy.”<sup>31</sup>

Historically based principles were of great significance to the executive officer corps. First of all, such work demonstrated that the experience of the Royal Navy prior to the advent of steam and torpedoes was relevant to the predicament that Britain faced at the turn of the century. As Mahan argued in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* in 1890, while the application of strategic and tactical thought were profoundly affected by changes in technology, the essential truths of handling military forces to carry out their functions were unaltered.<sup>32</sup> At the same time that Mahan asserted that some aspects of

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<sup>30</sup> Dewar, *Significance of Naval History*, 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, “Executive Command and Staff in Naval Warfare,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 40.

<sup>32</sup> Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, 9.

strategic thought were immutable, naval affairs became relatively stable. Once the basic outline of the battleship, cruiser and destroyer forces were shown to reprise the former roles accorded to the ship-of-the-line, the frigate and the gunboat, the strategic and tactical function of each element as defined by Corbett could be effectively integrated into a general theory of maritime warfare.<sup>33</sup>

Modern British naval officers were the heirs of Nelson and of a tradition that stretched back several centuries. When the experience of officers in previous wars was made relevant to the present, it only reinforced their importance. These experiences provided more than mere idols to be worshipped, they were invaluable resources in the “scientific” investigation of the nature of command. Furthermore, the emphasis on the human aspect of war, even in a highly technical environment, was considered the most important lesson. In addition, the relevance of this material tended to reverse the “narrowing” of the professional environment caused by the corps’ adaptation to its new environment in the second half of the century. Many justifications of the authority of the officer corps in the 1870s and 1880s rested on the technical skills of handling a warship under sail. Indeed, one of the things most admired about Admiral Sir Gerard Noel, the persistent advocate of sail training, was that he was the last officer to sail an ironclad into an anchorage in the face of an adverse wind, tacking no fewer than thirteen times in rapid succession. In the same way, the best and brightest officers quickly realized that the most rapid avenue of advancement was specialization in either the torpedo or gunnery branches that were highly mathematical and scientific in their approach. For instance, the gunnery school at H.M.S. *Excellent* was particularly suspect since it was associated with mindless

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<sup>33</sup> Corbett, *Some Principles*.

drill coupled with mathematical study of very little use aboard ship.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, as described in chapter IV, officers at sea became more specialized and more engrossed in their daily professional duties in order to ensure that their division or ship would win the approval of their superiors. Even the technical training pushed through by Fisher and Percy Scott after the turn of the century seemed devoted to a mechanistic and unrealistic form of battle practice that demonstrated only the skill of gunnery lieutenants and gun crews to hit floating targets.<sup>35</sup>

The training of officers seemed to direct them down a narrow path, a problem with which every education committee had struggled. As the training of the naval officer became more technical and specialized, and since the general education of an officer essentially ended at the age of twelve or thirteen, many officers feared that connections to the broader British society, particularly that segment that made decisions, would be lost.<sup>36</sup> In the words of Commander Reginald Plunkett, “[i]nstead of the brain being an active and productive machine, a thing of vast constructive power, we try to make it a cross between a museum and a lost property office.”<sup>37</sup> The power of expression and the capacity to argue cogently about state policy and naval strategy could only be imparted by a liberal education. Naval officers, if trained in history, would be in a strong position to be the vital links between political decisions and executive actions, in the process justifying their

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<sup>34</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, *The Navy from Within* (London: Gollancz, 1939). In marked contrast, the torpedo school H.M.S. *Vernon* was much more relaxed; see E.N. Poland, *The Torpedomen: H.M.S. Vernon's Story, 1872-1986* (London: E.N. Poland, 1993), 26.

<sup>35</sup> For a contemporary view of this problem, see St. Barbara, “Fool Gunnery in the Navy,” *Blackwood's*, CLXXXIII (February 1908), 308-316.

<sup>36</sup> Dewar, *The Navy from Within*, 13-19; PRO ADM 116/1288, Custance Committee on Education, 585.

<sup>37</sup> R.Plunkett, “Naval Education,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 28.

dominance on the Board of Admiralty. In the opening article of *The Naval Review*, Captain H.W. Richmond wrote that “[a] lawyer, in reply to an officer who cut short an argument on naval policy and could only be understood by a naval officer, said: ‘I am a lawyer, sir, and we lawyers make it our boast that we can understand anything, provided it is intelligently explained.’”<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, even the traditional professional justifications of seamanship and the handling of ships of war were to be secondary to the art of command derived from history.

The struggle between the military and nautical sides – between the conduct of war and seamanship – has always existed, and in the nature of things must ever continue. During peace, war is usually forgotten, and seamanship assumes undue importance. The conduct of war then becomes predominant, and seamanship is found to be only a necessary and important handmaid, of which men learn to take what is essential.<sup>39</sup>

The apparent incapacity of the officer corps to fulfil the function of strategic forethought, as evidenced by Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson’s dreadful performance before the Committee of Imperial Defence at the peak of the Agadir Crisis of 1911, forced politicians to ram through changes in the composition of the Admiralty with the institution of a naval staff.<sup>40</sup> History also contributed to the efficiency of the corps when it regularized and

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<sup>38</sup> H.W. Richmond, “Introductory,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 14.

<sup>39</sup> [R. Custance], “The Naval Officer: Past and Future,” *Blackwood’s*, CLXXVIII (December 1905), 735.

<sup>40</sup> When the two service chiefs were called before the Committee of Imperial Defence to discuss available options in the event that France and Germany went to war, the Army presented a lucid and realistic plan for the deployment of a force to the continent. On the other hand, Admiral Wilson’s scheme was best described as incoherent.



smoothed out the process of collecting, processing and applying information that could make the difference between operational successes and failures.

Hence, history provided a relevant, practical and authoritative basis for the reconstruction of the executive officer corps because it could be used to advocate and defend policy while also providing flexibility to commanders. A scientific system of command and scientific principles of war also served to keep other professions at bay. If the ultimate goal of naval warfare was to win battles, the continuation of executive dominance was not merely advisable but necessary. Indeed, the principles of command and the employment of technology had to be kept separate. As Herbert Richmond wrote of the courses at the War College before the war:

A great wave is at present in progress, due largely to the writings of Corbett, and to discussions at the War College. A new view of what war really means is taking shape. Men are beginning to see that it's not just a simple matter of one fleet forming a line ahead & fighting another fleet; and that victory does not necessarily lie with the biggest ship, the heaviest armed one of the most numerous fleet.<sup>41</sup>

While recognizing their importance, this view also placed the technical sciences into an intellectual framework that not only required a broader context but also defined those who practised them as subordinates. By providing an intellectual construct that asserted the relevance of the experiences of the great commanders of the age of sail, the cultural and intellectual traditions of the command function could be shown to be decisive in producing the great victories that established the reputation of the Royal Navy. Methods of propulsion were of secondary importance, as Admiral Sir Reginald Custance explained:

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<sup>41</sup> NMM, RIC 7/1, Richmond to W.H. Henderson, 23 July 1913.

The working of the sails or machinery is entirely secondary to questions which govern the fighting— to tactics, to strategy, to the discipline and spirit of the crews, and, in fact, to all that is embraced under the general term, “conduct of war.” In these fundamental matters the change in the motive power has not introduced any alteration in principles.<sup>42</sup>

Seamanship no longer legitimized the executive branch but instead was subordinated to command. Strategy, tactics and the “higher” aspects of the naval profession were offered as replacements. The intellectual foundation for these aspects was history itself. By examining the records of the past, historians could provide a means for a redefinition of naval command.

The difficulty was convincing other officers of naval history’s importance. The first problem was persuading them that it was more than mere propaganda that could buttress imperial policy and enhance naval estimates. The enormous technological changes that were occurring during this period raised questions about the experience of previous generations. Warships were no longer powered by sail but were now dependent on a steady supply of coal. Moreover, highly professional and skilled engineers in any case managed them. Naval warfare was also more intense, and technological appliances bore little relation to anything that had existed even in the previous half century. As for the ships themselves, they were often obsolete only ten years after they had been completed. For instance, H.M.S. *Dreadnought*, the first all-big-gun battleship, was completed in 1906, was obsolete by 1918 and had already been superseded by two generations of capital ships, with yet another generation on the stocks.

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<sup>42</sup> [R.Custance], “Naval Education,” *Blackwood’s*, CLXXVIII (October 1905), 447.

Furthermore, naval officers were concerned primarily with what they considered “practical;” training or education that smacked of theory was suspect unless an obvious utility could be discerned. On the other hand, applied mathematics and applied sciences demonstrated that the executive branch was modernising itself and was in the running to keep engineers out of matters connected directly to the employment of weapons. Specialist officers in the gunnery and torpedo branches were in essence the engineer officers of the executive line. Further, these branches were stepping-stones to promotion and advancement.

The struggle to demonstrate the practicality of history as a tool for command began quite early. John Knox Laughton, in a lecture before the Royal United Services Institution, argued that

the study of naval history ... is very much neglected by Naval Officers, but I find also that an idea that the history of the past contains no practical lessons for the future, and it is therefore merely a useless branch of scholarship, daily gathers strength, and is, indeed, put prominently forward by those, whose opinions on purely technical questions have a just claim to our respect. The object which I have now in view is, distinctly, to combat this idea; to urge the use, advantage, and importance to Naval Officers of the study of naval history; to show that it contains lessons of the gravest meaning; which are not to be got at without labour; to address you as reading and thinking men, rather than as active and energetic Officers; thought the qualifications necessary for the one develop and strengthen those which guide the other; and the intelligence cultivated by study may fashion itself into a living and terrible thunderbolt of war.<sup>43</sup>

This message, however, gained acceptance only by fits and starts, and it was a constant struggle to convince officers that history was a practical tool for executive

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<sup>43</sup> J.K. Laughton, “The Scientific Study of Naval History,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XVIII, No.79 (1874), 508.

officers. In the active fleets, in particular, it was difficult to convince either junior or senior officers of this. Herbert Richmond, for example, once engaged in a heated discussion with the flag captain of the Channel Squadron over the use of historical knowledge in evaluating strategy.<sup>44</sup> Even after the war, an article in *The Naval Review* took the form of two officers discussing the nature of naval history and its practical purposes. The author assured fellow officers that historical sense could be combined with practical skills, “No, sir, on the contrary it is very good for the Service. For he won’t be round-shouldered, he won’t wear specs, probably he can play rugger, and at the same time can do quite a lot of History.”<sup>45</sup> Even at the War College, which supposedly was the home of historical research, one gifted officer was dismissed as “too historical” and concerns were expressed about his suitability for command as a result.<sup>46</sup> Lieutenant General Douglas Haig, who argued that issues of practicality could only be known in active conflict, however, issued the trump card:

Again, almost all aspects of the art of war are “theoretical” in time of peace; they only become “practical” when the actual killing begins. The practical man is the man with a strong imagination, able to realise the difference between the artificial conditions of peace and the (probably) real conditions of war; between the things which will

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<sup>44</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 49-50. Indeed, concern over the utility of history assumed more general proportions. For an ironic commentary see, Mercator Anglicanus, “A Plea for the Abolition of All Learning,” *Blackwood’s*, CLXXVIII, No. 1072 (March 1905), 398. “History is of no service to anybody save to the novelist, a poor foolish creature, whose existence is just tolerable because he can send us to sleep after a hard day in the city.”

<sup>45</sup> G.W.W. Hooper, “Is History any Good?” *Naval Review*, IX (1921), 338.

<sup>46</sup> PRO, ADM 203/99, Confidential Records of Officers Attending the War Course; comments were in reference to Lieutenant Alfred C. Dewar who attended the Spring 1908 session.

matter and those which will not: and who therefore concentrates his efforts on the former, to the exclusion of the latter.<sup>47</sup>

Even though officers like Arthur Wilson protested that manoeuvres at sea closely replicated war conditions, such claims rang distinctly hollow.<sup>48</sup> The published accounts in the *Parliamentary Papers* bore little resemblance to wartime conditions. For example, in the manoeuvres of 1900 one of the contending Admirals went merrily on his way extracting “ransoms” from various ports as he cruised around the British Isles.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the battle practices of gunnery departments often consisted of dreadnoughts firing at targets towed sedately by warships. Yet some continued to consider the study of history of limited utility.

The problem of the “practical” nature of history was exacerbated by the way in which history was taught at the War Course and was beginning to be taught in the Staff College just before the outbreak of war. History was made a small part of the curriculum of both courses, but much more attention was given to the study of international law and courts martial. Furthermore, history was taught by the lecture method, which was not the best way of forcing officers to think, especially when the lecturers were civilians. When Julian Corbett lectured at the course his reception was rather mixed.<sup>50</sup> Although

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<sup>47</sup> CCAC, Chartwell Papers (CHAR) 13/26, Notes on the Slade Report, February 1914, 9. See also Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters and Papers of Mahan*, III, 577-582, “Practical Words – An Address Delivered at the Naval War College,” September 1892.

<sup>48</sup> CCAC, CHAR 20/21, Memorandum on Naval War Staff, 30 October 1911.

<sup>49</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, “Naval Manoeuvres, 1897,” vol. LIV, C. 8803 (1898), 605.

<sup>50</sup> Schurman, *Education*, 150-151, relates how Corbett’s lectures had a tendency to become rather long-winded and obscure.

Richmond asserted the importance of Corbett's influence on the younger generation, others were not so certain. One officer referred to the distinguished historian as a "blithering ass" and wondered why the Admiralty had not severed its ties with him.<sup>51</sup> More senior officers were suspicious of his close connections to Fisher and were doubly suspicious of his strategic doctrine, which sought to circumscribe offensive strategy and assigned a relatively low priority to battle. Nor did it help when he caustically described such a policy: "You might as well try to plan a campaign by singing 'Rule Britannia.'"<sup>52</sup> At a 1993 conference Peter Stanford summarized this in a single sentence: "I am afraid the navy thought of Corbett as the fellow who made everything so complicated and didn't really want us to shoot it out with the Germans."<sup>53</sup> Richmond also noted Rear Admiral Henry Oliver's objection to Corbett: "This prejudice against laymen writing on naval subjects dies very hard, if indeed it does at all. It is responsible for a great deal of the lamentable strategy of this war."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> CCAC, R. Drax Papers (DRAX) 1/14, H. Wake to R. Plunkett, 22 October 1909. Another officer wrote in 1911 that "[f]or some years Mr. Corbett in the process of lecturing in the RN War College, permitted himself the indulgence of offering his audience his own views on the correctness or otherwise of the strategy adopted by naval officers in the past. His audience had usually treated his amateur excursions ... goodnaturedly; nevertheless his presumption has been resented, and he has apparently been deaf to the polite hints thrown out to him." Quoted in Gat, *History of Military Thought*, 490.

<sup>52</sup> Eric Grove, "Introduction," to Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, xxix.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Stanford, "Discussion of the Papers Written by Dr. Jon Sumida and Dr. David Rosenberg," in James Goldrick and John Hattendorf (eds.), *Mahan is Not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1993), 192. See also, CCAC, J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR) 1/3, Captain Christopher Cradock to Fisher, 9 May 1902; "I think Mr. Corbett writes like many others – like the 'globe-trotter' who writes a book in a three week acquaintance with a Country and then sets himself as an Authority."

<sup>54</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 156, diary entry, 26 April 1915; see also NMM, RIC 16/2, Commonplace Book, "The Amateur Strategist," n.d. "The professional sea officer has a superlative contempt of the 'amateur critic,' when subjects of strategy or tactics are under discussion and the amateur critic's ideas do not coincide with his own; when they do coincide, the critic is called 'this distinguished writer.'"

## **Social and Professional Uses**

The practitioners of scientific naval history prided themselves on producing objective accounts of past operations in order to extract universal principles of war. To execute this function successfully, historians were required to be at least nominally objective. Gaining insights through biased or misread evidence would be counter-productive because they would create “false positives” that might in turn lay down false pathways. Indeed, the pioneers in the field warned against facile or biased interpretations on just those grounds. History required hard and laborious study if the correct interpretation of the past was to be discerned. Assertions about the accuracy of an argument could be rigorously re-examined and perhaps even challenged on the basis of evidence that could be brought to bear on the question.

The types of questions asked were not driven by archival evidence but were devised in response to political, social and professional requirements. What were the principles of war to be derived from the historical record but a means to increase the stature and the efficiency of the executive branch? To a great degree the only questions asked related to the appraisal of the actions of past executive officers in combat or to the connection between state policy and naval strategy. History was a tool both to educate young officers and to buttress the importance of the executive.

If naval policy was about arranging and deploying forces to win a decisive engagement, the command element was obviously the most vital aspect. After all, commanders not only organized and commanded forces in battle but also were the crucial

link between the political and the operational in the formulation of strategy. Here was a readily constructed argument for executive primacy.

The problem with using history in this way was a number of influential individuals in and out of uniform appeared to ascribe far too much weight to its benefits. History was an interesting tool to many senior officers because it buttressed their claims to authority. The problem with the search for “objective” principles is that they could not be completely controlled by those in power since the archives could also be used to challenge the intellectual complacency of the officer corps and to question decisions taken by a commander or the Board of Admiralty. Further, as naval history became popular, an increasing number of people became conversant enough with it to challenge professional pronouncements. As well, objective truths or principles could be used to challenge discipline in the service. Officers who had studied history and its application to the art of command were a special challenge. Indeed, in early staff training great stress was laid upon the tact and discretion of staff officers lest they overstep their bounds. Admiral Sir Barry Domvile, himself an able staff officer, argued that

they have brought evils in their train. Filled with enthusiasm, they have shown a tendency to organise everything they can lay their hands on. This has led to an over-centralisation of authority ... Why think, when everything is done for one by a willing Staff?<sup>55</sup>

The emphasis on command and its exercise also served the political and social interests of the executive branch. Both the doctrine of decisive battle and the widely held belief that

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<sup>55</sup> Barry Domvile, *Look to Your Moat* (London: Hutchinson, 1937), 228.



Britain's national existence was dependent on the performance of those in command on the bridge buttressed the executive branch's claim to supremacy.

Thus, the naval history pioneered by Mahan and Laughton was extraordinarily useful for a number of reasons. First, history based on rigorous research techniques provided a ready-made pool of experience upon which naval officers could base their command decisions. The so-called "principles of war" derived from such research would enhance the power of command and make its exercise more effective and efficient. This was regarded as especially important, since future wars were increasingly expected to be quick and decisive. Moreover, the fate of the nation might ride on the performance of the officer corps.

Second, naval history placed command on a scientific basis and, along with the use of the developing social sciences, contributed to making the pretensions of the executive intellectually respectable.<sup>56</sup> Arguments based on aristocratic privilege or social stature were no longer sufficient. If command could be tied to principles of behaviour it would be provided with yet another form of legitimacy.

Third, history, as did command, could bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities. As the navy became atomized into various specializations, there was a danger that individual character and initiative would become irrelevant. Teaching historically-based principles could help to provide conceptual space that acknowledged the contribution of individual officers. Moreover, it legitimized personal development for both senior and junior officers. The staff system was an attempt to institutionalize a blend of art and science directly into the command structure in the Admiralty and afloat. Staff

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<sup>56</sup> For an example of this, see R. Plunkett, "The Psychology of War," *Naval Review*, I (1913).

officers were expected to use their training and intellectual capacity to think through problems, develop their own opinions and present them rationally and coherently.

Finally, historically derived justifications for the command element helped to assert the power of the executive *vis-à-vis* its professional competitors. If the goal of naval power was the decisive battle, the executive was the only branch qualified for command. Moreover, with the historical/intellectual school's influence, materiel was reduced to being merely the means to an end. Development of weapons and equipment had to be strictly subordinated to the needs of strategy. The development of larger and more expensive ships and certain technologies also had a tendency to create vested interests, a trend that was to be resisted.<sup>57</sup> Further, the principles of history fed directly into the scientific organization of command. "The laws whereby nature enables any form of life to make a successful struggle for existence are identical with the fundamental principles of organization unconsciously employed by the born organizer, and are as obvious in the latter as were the principles of strategy to Julius Caesar in his first campaign."<sup>58</sup>

History, then, served as a social and professional tool to buttress the position of the executive officer corps. Yet it was also a way of criticising their professional competence; as the command element was reduced to principles, history provided another weapon to challenge the decisions of senior officers and sometimes even the Admiralty itself.

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<sup>57</sup> Andrew Gordon, *Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996), 590-591.

<sup>58</sup> G.P. Orde, "The Science of Organisation," *Naval Review*, II (1914), 396.

## Chapter VIII

### Journals and Staffs: Organizational Change

But genius is rare, and cannot be reckoned on. Its place must be supplied in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred by the trained and disciplined mind.<sup>1</sup>

It is positively alarming that we should be dependent for victory on the idiosyncrasy of an Admiral!<sup>2</sup>

As a result of changes in the political, social and cultural climate after the turn of the century, a new basis for the authority of the executive class as a profession had to be devised. As we saw in Chapter VI, steps were taken to overhaul the education system and procedures for selection and promotion. Yet the very justification for the existence of the executive branch needed to be placed on a firmer intellectual and social foundation than mere “character” and tradition. To argue that the British naval officer possessed some form of mystical connection to the sea no longer sufficed. The Boer War demonstrated to the Army and the nation at large the weakness of leadership that emphasized the development of character and discipline without a grasp of organization and the so-called “higher” aspects of the art of war.<sup>3</sup> The exercise of command had to be restructured and placed on a scientific basis. In the words of Sir Charles Dilke:

It is sometimes said that we have done well hitherto without a department of General Staff, and we shall do as well in the future. The

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Haldane, “The Training of the Mind for Modern War,” *Naval Review*, VII (1919), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR) 1/3/90, J.A. Fisher to the Earl of Selborne, 25 February 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this concern extended to commerce; see Richard Haldane, “Great Britain and Germany: A Study in Education,” *Monthly Review*, V (November 1901), 38. “Our middle classes find their position threatened by a new commercial combination. They have been forced to realise that courage, energy, enterprise are in these modern days of little more avail against the weapons which science can put in the hands of our rivals in commerce, than was the splendid Dervishes against the shrapnel and the Maxims at Omdurman.”

answer is, that war has become much more complicated than it used to be and that all the Great Powers have discovered the absolute necessity of much more study and preparation than was known before. When we compare 1870 with 1866, and 1866 with 1859, and above all when we contrast Continental preparations for mobilization and concentration at the present moment with even the arrangements of 1870, we cannot but draw the moral that it is mere folly to assert that an organization which was sufficient for war purposes in old days is sufficient now.<sup>4</sup>

Two methods were implemented to make this ambition a reality. The first was the establishment of a Naval War Staff at the Admiralty in 1912 and the replication of that organization in the seagoing fleets; the second was the publication, beginning in 1913, of *The Naval Review* under the editorship of Admiral W.H. Henderson. The purpose of these two reforms was not only to make command arrangements more efficient and to lessen the “transaction costs” associated with the nature of war but also to retain the individualism and intangible qualities associated with traditional leadership. In other words, like the use of history, the staff and a journal was to bridge the gap between mechanical efficiency and individualism, while imagination and character were to be harnessed to an institutional structure. *The Naval Review* was a method to foster the legitimacy of this new organization, as it was purposely designed to act as a forum for advancing the ideas and arguments of all officers, regardless of rank or experience. Acting as an autonomous agent of reform with the unofficial endorsement of the Admiralty, it provided a way to legitimize the staff system and to diffuse ideas to promote reform. Further, it was a mechanism that was supposed to be above the rough and tumble of partisan politics and to demonstrate to prominent politicians like Balfour, Haldane and

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Dilke, “Our War Organization of the Future,” *United Service Magazine*, I (1890), 7.

Churchill that many up-and-coming young officers were neither completely devoid of thought nor slavishly trailing in the wake of their superiors.<sup>5</sup>

Both these reforms, however, were problematic for the officer corps. The staff appeared to threaten the very basis of the individual responsibility of the commander. Indeed, as one author put it, this would present the problem of not having the “individual it would be fair to shoot or hang in the event, say, of the perpetration by their Lordships of some fatal piece of folly.”<sup>6</sup> Even if his orders were obeyed, he would be dependent upon a corps of wiseacre “intellectual” officers of an elite branch to translate his orders into action. In particular, mid-grade officers, already smarting from the limitation of their authority aboard ship with the curtailment of executive authority, would be subject to orders generated by lieutenants and junior commanders. Many officers feared that, like staff officers in the German army, these men might become laws unto themselves and run roughshod over not merely their colleagues but also their superiors.<sup>7</sup> Further, there were concerns that such specialist officers would become so divorced from the sea that they would lose their skill as “practical” men and take refuge in the world of abstract thought. Another school of thought, argued most prominently by Arthur Wilson, held that staff command was suited only to armies; as navies worked in such a radically different

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<sup>5</sup> This was particularly attractive to governments since advice tendered by the Naval Staff could effectively demonstrate to the public and the press that they had not ignored the needs of national defence to the serve party interest. See, for example, “The Balance of Power in Europe: Its Naval Aspect,” *Blackwood's*, CXLIII (1888), 280.

<sup>6</sup> “A Naval General Staff,” *United Service Magazine*, III (1890), 461.

<sup>7</sup> John Leyland, “Naval War Staffs,” *Brassey's Naval Annual* (1912), 112.

environment, such methods not only were unnecessary but also dangerous.<sup>8</sup> Also, secrecy of plans could easily be compromised the more widely the plan was diffused, and confidential material and opinions concerning the capacity and character of the commander might become a topic of discussion in the wardroom and be leaked. Finally, there was a knotty constitutional problem regarding the position of the First Lord and the Board of Admiralty. Proposals for reform envisioned that the staff was to be under the direct supervision of the First Sea Lord, while the responsibilities of the staff would quite obviously touch upon areas under the supervision of the other Sea Lords. Further, the authority of the Board was more along the lines of a cabinet of ministers than a government department. How was the collective responsibility of the naval members of the Board to be maintained when one member possessed all the responsibility of command and the staff? Moreover, there was deep concern that obstruction could be expected from the Admiralty's civil staff that was the nexus of communication between the fleet and Whitehall.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulty surrounding *The Naval Review* was about control over content and editorial direction. Despite complaints of persecution by some of the founders, the fact remained that the *Review* was well received not only by the Admiralty but also by Cabinet ministers. Indeed, in 1911 the Admiralty nearly began co-publishing a journal with the Army under the editorship of Captain Mark Kerr, but negotiations with the

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<sup>8</sup> CCAC, Chartwell Papers (CHAR) 21/20, Memorandum by Admiral Sir Arthur K. Wilson, October 1911. See also Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Cabinet Papers (CAB) 1/31, pt. 2, Notes on Sir A.K. Wilson's Memorandum on Staff, 1 November 1911. Wilson argued that such a system would dangerously interfere with the capacity of the commander to conduct operations as he saw fit.

<sup>9</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Cabinet Papers (CAB) 1/31, pt.2, Memorandum by G. Ballard, 1911.

Treasury fell apart.<sup>10</sup> Some officers were uncomfortable with the anonymous nature of the journal and the lack of authority over the editor. As W.H. Henderson was a retired admiral and seemed rather careful in the first two volumes of the journal, this problem seemed well in hand. However, during the war Jellicoe alleged that an article in *The Review* divulged secret information, and the journal was eventually suppressed for the duration of hostilities.<sup>11</sup> Henderson attempted to find ways to maintain it but continually hit the stone wall of Admiralty intransigence. Blaming Jellicoe, Henderson embarked on a public campaign that criticized the Admiralty machinery through the newspapers. The rejection of Admiralty control and the maintenance of the anonymity of contributors were considered crucial to its usefulness.

The way in which the executive branch attempted to deal with the challenges of technology and the apparent gap between the traditional culture of command as it existed in the nineteenth century and the cold realities of competing professionalisms was to professionalize the art of command by introducing scientific principles. The principles advanced by the Prussian General Staff, in combination with modern forms of “scientific management” as put forward, for example, by Frederick Winslow Taylor at the turn of the century promised to elevate command over and above other groups while at the same time providing a rational intellectual and professional basis for its exercise according to professional values.<sup>12</sup> Transaction costs, or what Clausewitz called “the friction of war,”

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<sup>10</sup> PRO, Admiralty Papers (ADM) 1/8318, File on proposed combined Army-Navy Review, 1911.

<sup>11</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8423/157, Censorship of *The Naval Review*, 1915.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911; reprint, Norcross, GA: Engineering and Management Press, 1998).

were reduced as far as practicable by the entire organization running as a smooth machine to transform the will of the commander into the successful conduct of operations.<sup>13</sup>

The first institutional mechanism was the establishment of the Naval War Staff, which finally took shape after Churchill came to the Admiralty in 1911, along with its antecedents, the War Course and the Department of Naval Intelligence, which had started in the 1880s. The second mechanism was the circulation of professional knowledge and the advocacy of professional standards on a wider basis than merely among those who had passed through the War Course, who were destined to participate in the specialized staff courses in the junior ranks or who had gone to the Army's Staff College at Camberley. To reassure all officers that these new specialist staff officers were not merely another elite, professional knowledge and the staff command system had to be diffused through the ranks. This process of generating discussion, diffusion and debate was to be accomplished by establishing a professional journal which invited officers not merely to read what was produced by a minority of naval and civilian experts, but to take up the pen themselves and make contributions to their service.

Hence, for those attempting to integrate the staff system it was imperative that it have legitimacy in the eyes of the officers. But it was equally important that at least a cadre should be at the forefront of command reorganization to limit the interventions of civilians, especially an exuberant First Lord in the person of Winston Churchill. Both were to work hand in glove. Staff training was also vitally important to standardize conduct and procedures and to lessen "transaction costs." Officers working in a systematic fashion would ensure that no vital detail was neglected in the fulfilment of the

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<sup>13</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (1823; reprint, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 119-122.



wishes of the commander, while at the same time relieving their superior of all the needling day-to-day details. Hence, the staff system did not impair the culture of command but extended its reach and amplified the power of the commander.

Furthermore, not only should an effective staff system be more efficient but also it must avoid infringing upon the initiative of the commander. While the staff officer was to act as an adviser, he in no way could limit the prerogative of the commander to make decisions and give executive directions. To ensure this, great pains were taken not only in official memoranda but also in the specialist training courses where officers were repeatedly told that humility and tact were essential qualifications for their future role.<sup>14</sup> This was indeed imperative to guarantee that the use of staff resources would be maximized and that senior officers would be reassured of their status.

An important part of the system was to provide procedures and standardized command responses while at the same permitting the exercise of individual initiative. Shortly after the establishment of the staff in the Admiralty, Churchill deemed it imperative that the structure in Whitehall should be duplicated in the staffing arrangements of active commands and that the Admiralty should directly assign staff officers. As an Admiralty memorandum put it, “[t]he aim of the following notes is to suggest on broad lines a scheme of organization for naval staff duties afloat, with a view

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<sup>14</sup> PRO, ADM 203/69, Royal Naval College, Session 1924-1925. See also CCAC, R. Drax Papers (DRAX) 1/21, H.W. Richmond to W.H. Henderson, c.1913. “We *must* avoid as much as we can incurring the reproach of being a Society of Superior Beings who can lecture their fellow officers.”

that no action which can be foreseen in time of peace shall be lost sight of in the outbreak of war, while relieving the various C. in C.'s of any anxiety regarding minor details.”<sup>15</sup>

The starting points were the so-called principles of war gleaned from the historical record, as we saw in Chapter VII. Historical research and the evaluation of the conduct of others were invaluable tools in the formation of doctrine and a standardized theory of maritime war. In the words of Kenneth Dewar:

Experience of modern naval warfare being extremely limited, and the methods of command of our admirals in the eighteenth century never having been fully elucidated from a staff point of view, it is necessary to seek in military history, where the subject has been exhaustively investigated, some principles which will guide us in a further treatments of the purely naval point of view.<sup>16</sup>

Staff advocates also believed that a systematic and “scientific” approach to problem solving was of paramount importance. For instance, an article in *The Naval Review* sought to teach officers to evaluate situations according to set criteria.<sup>17</sup> The effort was two-fold: to save time and to be clear and conform to a standardized formula.<sup>18</sup> Immediately after the war, Captain Barry Domville laid down a distinct procedure for staff planning.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/120, Memorandum by Rear Admiral Ernest Troubridge, 18 October 1911.

<sup>16</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, “The Executive Command and Staff in Naval Warfare – I,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 33.

<sup>17</sup> L. Halliday, “Notes on Appreciating a Situation,” *Naval Review*, II (1914), 186-202 and 305-321.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8588/81, War Plans Headings – Guide for Drawing Up Plans for Future Wars, June 1920. See also PRO, ADM 1/8628/120, Memorandum re. War Plans and Staff by HW Richmond, 29 July 1921.

## The Staff

Adequate preparation for war is the only guarantee for the preservation of the wealth, natural resources and territory of a State; and it can only be based upon an understanding firstly of the probable dangers that may arise, secondly of the best general method of meeting them as taught by the principles to be deduced from the events of history, and thirdly of the most efficient application of the war material of the era.<sup>20</sup>

The introduction of the Naval War Staff in 1912 was in many respects the culmination of a process that had accelerated at the end of the nineteenth century and encompassed not merely armies and navies but also large multi-unit, professionally-managed corporations. In late nineteenth-century industry and commerce these large corporate structures became increasingly complex and quite impossible for one man or even one family to oversee effectively. Strategic planning and policy had to be divided from line management to ensure that the company could adjust to long-term trends. A standardized system that permitted managers to understand and regulate the behaviour of subordinates was required. Hence, it should not be surprising that perhaps the largest single employer in the United Kingdom – the Admiralty – should be struggling with the exact same managerial revolution as had radically altered the world of business.<sup>21</sup> In order to lessen the “transaction costs” of naval defence, both in terms of finance and the unnecessarily high losses in the event of war, it was imperative that naval officers be able to demonstrate that they were entitled to the positions they held as executive officers.

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<sup>20</sup> PRO, CAB 17/8, Memorandum by Captain G. Ballard, 1911.

<sup>21</sup> PRO, ADM1/8558/133, the necessity of the Naval Staff under peace conditions, 1919. “The idea of a Staff is not purely naval or military. A Staff of some sort is found in every business of any size, and it is not too much to say that the principle underlying the Naval Staff will be found incorporated in some form or another in all large industries.”

The duty and power of naval command had to be regulated precisely because the very existence of the British state and the empire might very well depend on decisions at a crucial point in a decisive battle against a resolute opponent. When Winston Churchill referred to Admiral Sir John Jellicoe as the only man “who could lose the war in an afternoon,”<sup>22</sup> he was merely underscoring the importance not only of the officer commanding the British fleet but also, albeit implicitly, of a system that ensured that the officer would perform his functions in a regularized fashion. The defence of the nation was too important merely be left to the discretion of a single man. Command had to be regulated by some “scientific principles” to have a wider legitimacy outside the naval service. Indeed, naval officers who had emphasized the idea of the importance of the Navy had exposed themselves to closer examination of the structure of the service and the competence of officers.

From a functionalist perspective, the prerequisite for an effective structure to regulate and minimize “transaction costs” was the centralization of power and authority at the centre of the organization and the enhancement of its capacity to govern and regulate the rest of the structure.<sup>23</sup> The central governing mechanism of the Royal Navy was the Board of Admiralty, which had an organizational history that extended back to the seventeenth century. However, only in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century did the Board increased its power to regulate the operation of its outlying “subsidiaries” headed by senior officers engaged in day-to-day

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<sup>22</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918* (abridged and rev., London: Thornton Butterworth, 1931), 589.

<sup>23</sup> See, William G. Roy, *Socializing Capital: The Rise of the Large Industrial Corporation in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-20.

activities. The Admiralty had moved slowly to regulate the entry, training and retirement of officers throughout the nineteenth century, and it continued to centralize power administratively. Yet the real leap forward was the set of structural changes that gave the Board greater effective control over daily operations and the exercise of operational command.

Agitation for a naval staff was rooted in a deeper cultural and technological problem. In the past the Admiralty had been primarily an administrative structure, and its capacity to intervene in operations was severely limited. Whilst in the Napoleonic wars the Admiralty had employed a semaphore signalling system between Whitehall and Portsmouth, and during the middle decades of the century it had used the telegraph, there remained no way of ordering the movement of naval forces in real time until the advent of wireless telegraphy in the 1890s and 1900s. In the words of A.J.L. Blond, “[p]rior to 1900 the Admiralty lacked the staff, resources, expertise and, above all, the communications to function as an operational command centre.”<sup>24</sup>

With the threat of torpedo attacks on the fleet in port, the barrier of the English Channel now seemed more of a bridge. The Boer War had also thrown doubt on the professional competence of the Navy to protect the British Isles from overseas invasion. This security concern was raised to the point that several parliamentary and cabinet inquiries were held.<sup>25</sup> Further, the advent of steam had accelerated the pace of naval

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<sup>24</sup> A.J.L. Blond, “Technology and Tradition: Wireless Telegraphy and the Royal Navy, 1895-1920” (PhD. Diss., University of Lancaster, 1993), 180; see also “Musing Without Method,” *Blackwood's*, CLXXXV, No. 1120 (1909), 280.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, “Notes supplied by the Admiralty for the Use of the War Office,” vol. XLVIII, Cd. 5539 (1911), 735. “Taking all

warfare and made close control over forces ever more imperative. Moreover, the increased cost of naval forces and the human resources required meant that neither could be frittered away lightly. Lastly, the influence of the decisive naval battle seemed to mould the thinking of naval officers and others in the direction of believing that a decisive victory at sea would determine not only the future of the British empire but the survival of the state itself. Indeed, one officer wrote in the autumn of 1914 that “A thousand years scarce serve to form a State; an hour may lay it in the dust.”<sup>26</sup>

The formation of the Naval Intelligence Department in the 1880s laid the foundations for the staff system. This body was created to collect and collate information, to act as a clearing-house for the distribution of intelligence and to serve as an adviser to the Board in matters affecting policy. Charles Beresford put the notion of a full naval staff system forward in the aftermath of the 1885 naval scare that found the Admiralty unprepared.<sup>27</sup> When Admiral Sir John Fisher became First Sea Lord in 1904, a revised distribution of business in the Admiralty gave him enhanced power over strategic dispositions and laid the effective foundations for the establishment of a staff. All matters pertaining to the readiness of the fleet were made the direct responsibility of the naval officer holding that post.<sup>28</sup>

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these facts into consideration, he would probably decide as the Admiralty have done, that an invasion on even the moderate scale of 70,000 men is practically impossible.”

<sup>26</sup> R. Plunkett, “With the Grand Fleet 10/10/14,” *Naval Review*, II (1914), 311.

<sup>27</sup> PRO, ADM 116/3106, War Organisation, 1886.

<sup>28</sup> *BPP*, “Order in Council of 10 August 1904: Designations of the Various Members of and Secretaries to the Board of Admiralty and the Definition of the Business to assigned to Them,” vol. XLVIII, Cd. 2416 (1905), 163.

In the two decades before 1914, certain technological and geopolitical changes had occurred in British naval affairs. First, the fleet had been increasingly concentrated in Home waters where the Admiralty had more direct authority in its management. This fed into the Fisher-Beresford dispute of 1907-1909 in which Beresford claimed the position of “Admiralissimo” in home waters where, as an independent commander-in-chief, he had considerable freedom to make plans in line with broad Admiralty directives.<sup>29</sup> This doctrine was deemed to be inappropriate, as an Admiralty memorandum made clear:

It has often been contended by a certain school of naval critics that in war time the whole of the naval forces in home waters ought to be placed under the direct control of one Admiral, who should be the Commander-in-Chief afloat, and that, once hostilities had commenced, this officer should not be interfered with in the execution of the plan of action he had previously arranged, or might choose to modify according to circumstances, as seemed to him most desirable...This, however, is a contention that never could be accepted, though, no doubt, in earlier days a qualified form of such power was often permitted....<sup>30</sup>

After all, the Admiralty was the only authority directly responsible to Parliament.

The relations between Fisher and serving senior officers were strained severely by this nearly systematic centralization of power at the expense of the other Commanders-in-Chief. Admiral Sir Gerard Noel, the Commander-in-Chief of the China Squadron, had to be restrained from tendering his resignation when the last battleship on his station was withdrawn as a result of Fisher’s redistribution scheme.<sup>31</sup> The Commander-in-Chief

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<sup>29</sup> Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Age of Fisher, 1904-1919* (5 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1961-1974), I, 92-93.

<sup>30</sup> PRO, ADM 116/3018, Printed Memorandum, 4 August 1908

<sup>31</sup> Sydney Fremantle, *My Naval Career, 1880-1928* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), 113-114.

North America and West Indies Station found that his residence in Halifax had been sold without his notification, and he had consequently lost some personal property.<sup>32</sup> Even loyal friends of Fisher suspected his intentions. Prince Louis of Battenberg, for example, thought that Fisher had deliberately weakened the strength of the Channel Squadron just to spite Beresford.<sup>33</sup> This was comparatively minor compared to the enormous press campaign carried out by Admiral Sir Reginald Custance and Sir William White in calling for an inquiry into the dictatorial nature of Fisher's reign that began in 1907. "Sir John Fisher is the Board of Admiralty incarnate and whether in the domain of naval strategy, naval construction, naval administration, his voice is the only voice that counts."<sup>34</sup> Calls for limitations on the power of the First Sea Lord were echoed in *The Morning Post* and *The Spectator*.

Until a proper control is exercised over him, as over other servants of the State, by our rulers, and until common-sense and prudence are made to prevail even over expert opinion, the perils which we are pointing out will continue. To be quite plain, Sir John Fisher is one of those men whom predominant influence and absolute power render reckless. Power has gone to his head.<sup>35</sup>

Fisher's position was hampered by the fact that although he had centralized power in the hands of the First Sea Lord, he had made little effort to extend the staff system of command or to regularize the system at the Admiralty. As a result, Fisher's actions were

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<sup>32</sup> E. Marjorie Moore (ed.), *Adventure in the Royal Navy: The Life and Letters of Admiral Sir Arthur William Moore* (Liverpool: E.M. Moore, 1964), 107.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Kerr, *Prince Louis of Battenberg: Admiral of the Fleet* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1934), 225-226, Battenberg to Admiral Sir George King-Hall, 24 February 1909.

<sup>34</sup> Civis [Sir William White], *The State of the Navy in 1907: A Plea for Inquiry* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1907), 11.

<sup>35</sup> "A Position of Peril," *The Spectator*, 6 July 1907.



regarded as a power grab in which he only seemed interested in extending his personal reach through official fiat or through members of the so-called “Fishpond.”<sup>36</sup> Only after the Beresford Inquiry, when the Cabinet virtually insisted on the formation of a Naval War Staff, did Fisher move to create what he called a “War Council.”<sup>37</sup> This Council was at best a poor substitute because it was comprised of officers, such as the Head of the War College, who were not resident in London. Herbert Richmond, for one, was unimpressed: “It is the most absurd bit of humbug that has been produced for a long time.... The 1<sup>st</sup> Sea Lord remains supreme & imposes his crude strategical ideas on the nation.”<sup>38</sup> Rear Admiral Ernest Troubridge, though offering a more balanced perspective, was equally damning: “*In practice it is understood that the War Council never meets at all. The plans exist only in the head of the First Sea Lord, and it is doubtful if the details are worked out to give effect to them.*”<sup>39</sup>

Not only had geopolitical constraints compelled the Admiralty to direct its energies almost solely toward the possibility of a great power conflict, especially with Germany, but changes in the capacity of central authority in the Royal Navy were

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<sup>36</sup> For an example, see CCAC, F.C.D. Sturdee Papers (SDEE) 1/17, My Service Connections to Lord Fisher. While Sturdee was Chief of Staff (COS) under Beresford in the Mediterranean, Fisher asked him to keep the First Sea Lord apprised of his chief’s activities.

<sup>37</sup> BPP, “Report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to Inquire into Certain Questions of Naval Policy Raised by Lord Charles Beresford,” vol. LIV, No. 256 (1909), 303; and PRO, ADM 1/8377/120, “The Organisation of a Naval War Staff,” 1909.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 62, diary entry, 27 October 1909.

<sup>39</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/120, The Necessity for Co-ordinating Staff Work Afloat, 18 October 1911, Memorandum by Rear Admiral Ernest Troubridge, original emphasis.

underlined by the growing importance of wireless communication. An official Admiralty memorandum stated:

The advance of wireless technology has been so great and so rapid that an entirely new development of strategic organization becomes imperative. With the present installation it is possible to receive information and to transmit orders over a large area from the Admiralty... The result of this enormous advance is that the Admiralty are compelled to assume the responsibility for the strategic movements of the fleet in a far more complete manner than ever was formerly practicable.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, control would be further vested at the centre. This underscored the power of the Admiralty not merely to set strategic policy and administration but also to act as a central headquarters with the power and capacity to manage and co-ordinate forces in such a way as to centralize command decisions.

Furthermore, in the Navy afloat the tactical and strategic environment in which officers were expected to conduct operations had become increasingly complex. While admirals in the 1880s could content themselves with clock-work manoeuvres, where one central brain co-ordinated the movements of ships, there was now a third dimension in the form of locomotive torpedoes. Just before the outbreak of war in 1914, dirigibles and aeroplanes extended the possibilities even further. With the enhanced capacity of torpedo fire and the previously unused capability of heavy artillery, tactical battle space (to use a modern term) had expanded exponentially.<sup>41</sup> While at the turn the century, experts calculated that ranges of action would not exceed 4,000 yards; by 1916 the 5<sup>th</sup> Battle Squadron opened fire accurately on the lead elements of the German High Seas Fleet at

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<sup>40</sup> PRO, ADM 116/3018, Printed Memorandum "Wireless Telegraphy in War," 4 August 1908.

<sup>41</sup> PRO, ADM 116/862, Slade Report on Royal Naval War College (1913), 7.

over 23,000 yards.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, battle fleets dramatically increased in size, not merely by the addition of more capital units but also through the multiplicity of scouting cruisers and the destroyer screen. Tactical and strategic co-ordination tested the limits of the capacity of an individual commander to cope with dispositions and organization. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, the able commander of the Grand Fleet from 1914 to 1916, worked himself ragged attempting to co-ordinate all these elements. Obviously, alternative command arrangements were necessary to relieve the commander of routine, and the devolution of command authority had to permit the initiative of subordinates in harmony with stated intentions. While political pressure existed for such changes, the physical environment with which officers had to contend had changed dramatically as well.

Consequently, the element of time was critical; fleets now moved at great speed and “decisive” action could occur with a rapidity that forbade an officer from taking too much time to make a tactical decision. With the complication of forces and the compression of time, alternative arrangements and a more advanced form of management were required. As Commander Reginald Plunkett put forward in *The Naval Review*:

A point worthy of note is that many of us find it difficult to realise the supreme importance of TIME in modern Naval operations. Even in Napoleon’s day his knowledge of the value of minutes was the foundation of much of his success. But now, the time to spare between receipt of information and necessary action is comparable to that of a railway signalman who sees an express rounding a curve and knows that the line is blocked a mile ahead. There are many cases in modern war where a few seconds of time wasted may cause the loss of a thousand lives. When, for instance, a signal requires some ship to turn round and go to the support of another engaged by the enemy; to delay two and a half minutes before turning will bring her into action five

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996), 113.

minutes late. What results may not be produced by five minutes of modern gunfire?<sup>43</sup>

More than this, however, the existence of a naval staff was regarded as a mark of professional standing and self-respect among many officers. Lord Esher emphasized this in a letter to Winston Churchill in which he argued that the staff system would “transfer the centre of strategical gravity from civilians to sailors.”<sup>44</sup> Operational and other orders from the Board were transmitted to the Fleet through the Secretariat, and orders were signed by the civilian (except for the brief service of Rear Admiral Sir George Tyron in the 1880s) Permanent Secretary. If operational command were to operate directly from the Admiralty, it was imperative that officers in uniform execute this function.

Yet many officers had an uneasy feeling that the “intellectual capital” to run a staff organization was lacking.<sup>45</sup> The higher aspects of command were almost entirely neglected, and the training that did exist at the War Course at Portsmouth was unsatisfactory. This course, started in 1900, was to operate as a voluntary program to provide senior officers with a deeper grasp of their command responsibilities. But there was pointed criticism of any attempt to get beyond the nuts and bolts of organization and to delve into war plans. Rear Admiral Charles Ottley, the D.N.I., criticized the Director of the War College for going beyond his mandate: “the instant he left the *terra firma* of past experience and established historical fact, and launched out upon the uncharted sea of prophecy concerning the conduct and plans for potential wars of the future, he was

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<sup>43</sup> R. Plunkett, “With the Grand Fleet (10/10/14),” *Naval Review*, II (1914), 311.

<sup>44</sup> M.V. Brett (ed.), *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (4 vols., London: Ivor Nicolson & Watson, 1934-1938), III, 72; Esher to Winston Churchill, 13 November 1911.

<sup>45</sup> Dewar, *The Navy From Within*, 154.

mistaking his functions and dangerously exceeding his duty.”<sup>46</sup> Officers attending the War Course should be taught

the simple bed-rock facts of the system on which the British Fleet will be administered, victualled and stored in war ... They should not be encouraged to ‘Mind high things’ such as secret plans of campaign for possible wars with other powers... but should condescend to matters of lower degree; how to plan an intelligent (and subordinate) but necessary and useful part in furthering the smooth mobilization and efficient conduct of the ship or fleet on which they may be called to serve in war.<sup>47</sup>

Before proceeding further, it is important to consider exactly what a staff system of command offered the Royal Navy both at Whitehall and in the fleets. As one officer wrote in 1919, the role of the staff was three-fold: first, to collect and keep to hand information needed by a commander to make a decision; second, to work out detailed instructions about how to carry out the desires of the commander; and third, to ensure that training was carried out according to the doctrine approved by the commander.<sup>48</sup> Hence, the naval staff was to co-ordinate and execute the will of the commanding officer and was in no way intended to subvert command functions or to initiate operations. At the Admiralty, staff functions included the co-ordination of procurement, logistics and facilities to carry out or prepare for operations and the co-ordination of strategy and policy with other organs of state, including the other armed services and government departments. The staff also existed to put forward operational plans, training programmes

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<sup>46</sup> PRO, CAB 17/6, Notes of a Conversation between Ottley and Fisher, December 1909.

<sup>47</sup> PRO, CAB 17/6, C. Ottley and Fisher, December 1909.

<sup>48</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8558/133, the Necessity of the Naval Staff under Peace Conditions, 8 May 1919.

and strategic and tactical doctrine. In other words, it existed to co-ordinate command-and-control arrangements for the entire service.

In the aftermath of the German victories over Austria in 1866 and France in 1870-1871, Prussian-style general staffs came to be regarded as a sort of a magic potion to co-ordinate, plan and execute massive military operations that could gain a decisive victory in a short period of time. Located at a central headquarters well behind the lines, general staffs sifted through intelligence reports, co-ordinated troop movements and provided essential command-and-control links with detached armies. Against an opponent not blessed with such a system, decisive victory could often be achieved expeditiously. However, in naval affairs, staffs came a little later, although not nearly as late as in Britain. When the Japanese laid the foundations of their naval establishment at the end of the nineteenth century, they copied nearly everything British down to the outright purchase of major warships from British shipyards and the laying of the foundation stone for Etajima from the Royal Naval College. Yet two things the Japanese did not copy were British-style education and British-style command arrangements, both of which they found wanting.<sup>49</sup>

War at sea, officers like Wilson claimed, was entirely different than military operations. Ships were relatively self-contained, rendering them free from lines of supply for weeks at a time. Moreover, the commanding officers were generally embarked and hence part and parcel of the entire package. In essence, every naval unit was part of the first line. Further, many held that intellectual training was of only limited utility for the

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<sup>49</sup> David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 25-31.

realities of warfare.<sup>50</sup> As Fisher wrote to Arnold White in the aftermath of the Boer War, “it is a wonderful comparison that we should spend 50 per cent less on the Navy than on the Army in developing our intellectual equipment, and 25 times less than is spent on the German equivalent to the British Navy, which is their Army!”<sup>51</sup>

The event that most forced the pace of creating a naval staff was the performance of Arthur Wilson at the Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D.) meeting in response to the Agadir Crisis of 1911. While the Army presented Cabinet with a detailed and credible plan of action, the Navy’s plan was extraordinarily vague and amateurish. Reginald McKenna, then First Lord, appeared unable to impose reform on the unwilling service. “Tug” Wilson, of course, was an arch-centralizer and had no inkling of the proper use of subordinates, unlike either Fisher or even Beresford. As Battenberg wrote to Selborne in 1904, “Beresford and Wilson are, I take it, our two Naval leaders – practically the only ones until men like Lambton, May etc, come on. Beresford trains the Flag Officers and Captains under him, but Wilson does not...”<sup>52</sup>

The inauguration of Naval Staff reform was problematic because it was not merely a case of appending a few extra officers to Whitehall. A drastic change in the culture of the officers corps was required, especially among senior officers, to make use of the staff, not just at the Admiralty but also at sea. Most of all, officers advocating the

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<sup>50</sup> Indeed, even the most intelligent and gifted officers recognized the limited usefulness of intellectual achievement. See, Hubert Grenfell, “The Best Method of Providing an Efficient Force of Officers and Men for the Navy,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, XXVI, No. 115 (1882), 301.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (3 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1952-59), I, 263, J. Fisher to Arnold White, 8 August 1902.

<sup>52</sup> Kerr, *Prince Louis of Battenberg*, 178, memorandum to Lord Selborne, June 1904.

reforms emphasized that the full power of the Cabinet and Parliament had to be used to overcome opposition, whether from senior officers or the civil staff of the Admiralty. Captain George Ballard, the D.N.I., argued that “[t]he great point on which a firm stand must be taken is that is being done by the Government. If that is so no opposition can stand in the end.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in the view of Ottley, “[t]he idea of a War Staff is acceptable enough to most men. But – if it is to be a real reform – the concrete thing will of necessity upset a lot of venerable and antiquated customers.”<sup>54</sup> The slowness to implement the reforms and the tentative approach to staff command led some officers to level criticisms that the entire experiment was designed merely to allay the fears of senior officers, as if to say “‘it is all right, don’t be frightened, this is only a dreadful innovation for ‘time of war,’ probably there won’t be a war at all, but we are putting up this arrangement just in case there might be one.”<sup>55</sup>

In his memorandum of January 1912 on the staff system, Churchill was quick to indicate that he did not intend that a specialist cadre of staff officers would monopolize crucial appointments at the Admiralty and that officers so posted would not lose their practical “edge” or the power of leadership and command.<sup>56</sup> Further, there was an attempt

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<sup>53</sup> PRO, CAB 1/31, pt.2, Memorandum on Staff, October 1911.

<sup>54</sup> PRO, CAB 1/31, pt.2, Rear Admiral Charles Ottley to Churchill, 13 November 1911.

<sup>55</sup> W.P. Koe, “Some Observations upon the Naval Staff System,” *Naval Review*, XII (1924), 665.

<sup>56</sup> As early as 1870, Major Alfred Jones, V.C. attempted to reassure officers of the value of staff officers even though they appeared less than heroic. Alfred Jones, “On The Education of Staff Officers,” *RUSI*, XIV, No. 59 (1870), 272, “What are the duties of the Staff Officer? His hands, it is true, are void of trophies, his lips are not blackened by gunpowder, and the sword which hangs at his side has rested in its scabbard perhaps all through the action; but he has been seen at daybreak among the skirmishers engaged in drawing a rapid sketch of the enemy’s position.”



to reassure the senior leadership that no diminution of the authority of flag officers was contemplated:

Naval war is at once more simple and more intense than war on land. The executive action and control of fleet & squadron Commanders is direct and personal in a far stronger degree than that of Generals in the field, especially under modern conditions. The art of handling a great fleet on important occasions with deft and sure judgement is the supreme gift of the Admiral, and practical seamanship must never be displaced from its position as the first qualification of every sailor.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, staff command neither entailed the extinction of the warrior spirit nor the establishment of a special corps of highly favoured officers who would divide the executive branch into different segments.<sup>58</sup> Capable officers deemed suitable for command in the higher ranks would be sent to receive such training as to enable a certain breadth of view. This thinking about staff officers did not change during the war. In 1920, the shoulder strap introduced as part of the uniform of staff officers was abolished. According to the docket on the issue, the Fourth Sea Lord in 1917 thought it “[m]ost undesirable that the Staff should become in any way alienated from the General Service Officers and considered a class apart.”<sup>59</sup>

The safety of the proposed staff system was that the officer responsible for heading it was a Chief of Staff who was to operate under the direct supervision of the

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<sup>57</sup> PRO, ADM 203/70, Memorandum by the First Lord on a Naval War Staff, 1912.

<sup>58</sup> John Leyland, “Naval War Staffs,” *Brassey’s Naval Annual* (1912), 112. “Certain safeguards were and are necessary, such as that of protecting the Navy from the danger of the rise of a distinct and privileged class of officers for whom commands and appointments would be reserved. Such a result could have no other effect than to weaken the spirit of comradeship in the Fleet and to discourage a large class of deserving and meritorious officers.”

<sup>59</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8583/44, Proposal to Abolish the Shoulder Strap for Staff Officers, March 1920.

First Sea Lord, the officer charged under the 1904 Order-in-Council with the preparation of the navy and executive command over all naval forces. Further, he would be a Flag Officer and hence have held a responsible command at sea. Moreover, there would be no restriction on the First Lord or First Sea Lord from consulting any member of the staff without consultation with the Chief of Staff. "This Direction is essential to prevent that group of evils which have always arisen from the "narrow neck of the bottle" system."<sup>60</sup>

Although Churchill's efforts may seem revolutionary, they were not. Nothing was done to alter the constitutional authority of the Board of Admiralty, and no real alteration in the system of command was implemented. The staff became yet another battleground in the fight over executive dominance. Once the naval staff had been established, Churchill constantly oversaw its activities and freely commented on its shortcomings. The First Lord closely observed the results of exercises and staff activities. Churchill was particularly unimpressed by the performance of the Director of Operations during the 1912 fleet manoeuvres. In an unsent letter to Battenberg, the First Sea Lord, Churchill wrote: "Paragraphs 2 and 3 on the same page are a confession of bankruptcy and an appeal by the War Staff to the cruiser flag officers to help them solve a problem upon which the War Staff are dumb." He went on to emphasize that the results of the war games needed to be analyzed systematically, if only because of the expenses associated with pay, victualling and fuel.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/13, Winston Churchill to First Sea Lord, 27 September 1912.

Churchill was also constrained by several factors. First, of course, was the Treasury, and the second was the obduracy of the senior officers. In a post-war article on the development of the naval staff, Ballard recounted that one or the other of these two sources scotched many of the policies needed during the war.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, the pressing issue of the shortage of officers reared its ugly head. As one officer advised Churchill, it would be an excellent idea for every lieutenant to pass through a course at the War College during his first four years of service. Despite the concentration of the fleet in home waters and the consequent relative ease of getting officers to Greenwich, “[i]t is, however, impossible to carry out this suggestion for some time to come as it would mean that an average of 30 Lieutenants would be constantly under training. We cannot spare any further number of Officers for courses under present conditions unless ships are paid off.”<sup>63</sup> Further, the authors of the staff system tried to integrate the concept of scientific regulation with personal leadership.

Nothing in the work of this division ... will relieve Flag Officers from their present duties and responsibilities in the training of the commands. But henceforward continuity and uniformity will be preserved by a central direction and co-ordination, which gathers up and authorises the established conclusions, without restricting reasonable initiative. It is no answer to the advocates of such a Division, to say that War Training is given by the Commanders-in-Chief and that war training is in the department of the First Sea Lord. The Commanders-in-Chief change repeatedly and with them their personal instruction changes, very often without leaving a trace behind. The First Sea Lord cannot possibly prepare manuals of tactical and strategic instruction. This work can only be done by a regular department at work.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> G.A. Ballard, “The Naval War Staff, 1912-1914,” *Naval Review*, XII (1924), 454.

<sup>63</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/118, Memorandum on Slade Committee, 5 April 1914.

<sup>64</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377, War Staff Training of Naval Officers, 1914.

However, the staff seemed focussed merely on the initial preparation of war plans, and there seemed to be no thought about the necessity to manage and co-ordinate a conflict that might stretch for years and require the entire resources of the community. As Fisher wrote to Churchill in 1911:

*The Naval War Staff*

*The Object to be attained*

All the resources of *every portion of the British Empire* – Naval, Military, Commercial, Financial, Diplomatic, Social, Political, to be co-ordinated and concentrated (*like boiling down an Elephant into a tea cup!*) for putting Pressure on the Enemy in the first 24 hours of the war.<sup>65</sup>

In the initial flurry of memorandums, it was suggested initially that all officers undergo a course in strategy, tactics and staff work, but the realities of maintaining the fleet on a virtual war footing made this impossible. As Battenberg minuted, “I fear the dearth of Officers will only permit of a very small beginning to be made in short courses for Lieutenants.”<sup>66</sup> In 1911, when the details of the staff system were being hammered out, Admiral Bethell suggested the establishment of two grades of staff officer, with the lower taking a four-month course and the senior completing a thirteen-month programme. Battenberg disagreed: “I do not agree with these proposals on principle, but as we do not possess the number of officers required under this scheme, it is hardly worth discussing.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/2, Fisher to Churchill, 6 November 1911, original emphasis.

<sup>66</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/118, Minute by Battenberg on the Slade Report, 9 May 1914.

<sup>67</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/120, Minute by Battenberg, December 1911.

When the staff system was to be extended beyond the Admiralty to the fleet as a whole, the issue of numbers of qualified officers re-surfaced.<sup>68</sup> The war course at Portsmouth was not sufficient, since it was designed mainly for seniors and very few lieutenants took it. As Ernest Troubridge, the first Chief of Staff, commented:

These establishments are not utilized to the fullest advantage. At present that are educational establishments where officers go who have nothing better to do, while they are awaiting an appointment to a ship &c. *The more brilliant officers, who ought to gain by a course of study there, usually get sea appointments and pass them by.*<sup>69</sup>

According to Admiral Sir Edmund Fremantle, much of the prejudice surrounding naval staff afloat arose from the rather poor reputation of captains of the fleet in the age of sail. Captains of the fleet were post captains or possibly junior flag officers serving as the Admiral's advisers without the responsibilities of commanding the flagship. Several of them were considered much too cautious, and the precedent of Nelson acting without one seemed to lessen the importance of the position:

That in a large fleet some senior staff officer is required there can be no doubt, and in the French and in most foreign navies the admiral's staff is much larger than in ours, but it is recognized that the directness of command, which is so important in naval matters, is liable to be impaired by a too numerous and influential staff, and in the British Navy there has always been a strong prejudice against a captain of the fleet...<sup>70</sup>

One of the chief opponents to the staff system was the sitting First Sea Lord, Arthur Wilson. Wilson's performance at the C.I.D. meeting in 1911 provoked

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<sup>68</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/120, Memorandum on the Report of the Slade Committee, 1914.

<sup>69</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/120, Memorandum "The Necessity for Co-ordinating Staff Work Afloat," 18 October 1911, emphasis in the original.

<sup>70</sup> Edmund Fremantle, *The Navy As I have Known It* (London: Cassell, 1904), 125-126.

considerable consternation among the Cabinet, and this rapidly led to a change in the First Lord and the ascension of Winston Churchill. Possessing a high level of ambition and energy, as well as a reforming streak, Churchill was determined to impose his will on Admiralty “colleagues.” He took nothing for granted, had a critical view of everything the Navy did and constantly “interfered” in the professional sphere of naval officers. While committed to the Navy’s welfare, he was equally determined that senior officers should be compelled to justify their policies. Examples of his interference even on petty details included, for instance, paying an official visit to the battle cruiser *Lion* when he asked an officer a rating’s name and then cross- examined the man to make sure his name was what the officer said.<sup>71</sup> Also, when inspecting the cadets at Osborne, he commented forcefully on the need to annihilate an opponent, much to shock of the commandant and the cadets themselves.<sup>72</sup> These peccadilloes were minor compared with the other policies he pushed, and he was already considered suspect as a renegade Tory and because of his apparently close relationship to the radical Chancellor, David Lloyd George. Other policies aimed aggressively at reforming the officer corps and the Naval Staff, and his advocacy of the Mate Scheme and lower deck reform struck at the very heart of the competence and exclusivity of the executive officer corps.

The staff system was bitterly resisted by many officers for several reasons. First of all, it was perceived as having been pushed by Liberal politicians who were not generally respected in the naval service. That an “amateur” like young Winston Churchill imposed

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<sup>71</sup> Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I, 254.

<sup>72</sup> Max Arthur (ed.), *The True Glory: The Royal Navy, 1914-1939* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), 33-34, recollections of Naval Cadet Charles Drake.

them was regarded as a slap in the face to officers who had served for decades. Moreover, it seemed to attack the competence of senior commanders by saddling them with officers who had been to college and would be patched directly into an existing staff system aboard ship. As the system would be extended to the fleet at large to replicate and standardize decision-making, it would sap power from flag officers. It would not only remove the patronage a flag officer had in selecting officers for his personal staff but also make it possible for officers selected from the staff college, who were possibly unknown to the flag officer, to be assigned to his ship. Before these reforms were applied, appointments were generally rubber-stamped by the Admiralty. The change was justified by the need for a systematic, organized system that could function apart from the personality of the commander and by the need to regulate matters because of the frequent changes in commander in chief.<sup>73</sup> Central control was to be extended further by the creation of a Training Division to co-ordinate the training and doctrine of the entire fleet under the direction of the Admiralty staff.<sup>74</sup> The problem, of course, was that there was no consensus on strategic or tactical doctrine upon which to base directions. One way to solve that problem of both establishing doctrine and providing a corrective mechanism, as we will see in the next section, was the establishment of *The Naval Review*, which was completely unconnected to the power structure of the service and was independent from Admiralty influence except insofar as the Board could forbid serving officers from

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<sup>73</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377, War Staff Training of Naval Officers, April 1914.

<sup>74</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377, Memorandum "Development of the Admiralty War Staff," April 1914.

contributing (as it did in 1915) or exercise censorship (as it did in the spring of 1915 and again in 1919).<sup>75</sup>

A second mechanism involved the officers themselves. As more of them acquired specialized training as staff officers with plenty of “theoretical” training, often as juniors, they might be placed in a situation where they might lecture his chief on the “principles of war.” This concern was brought up in the testimony of officers before the Slade Committee of 1913, although their views were quickly disposed of in its report. “It has been stated in evidence that great exception is taken to young officers going to sea with W.S. [War Staff] against their names, and then presuming on the strength of this to lay down the law to their seniors... If such cases have occurred they are attributable to the officers themselves being unsuited to Staff work...”<sup>76</sup> In his critique of the Report, however, Douglas Haig was less concerned, asserting that “after all as long as the law laid down is sound it matters comparatively little whence it comes.”<sup>77</sup> Haig concluded that the problem was so urgent that it was vital for reforms to be instituted as quickly as possible, arguing: “But whatever its object, some time must elapse before its influence can begin to be felt – and in the meantime we should, presumably, be careful to steer clear of any wars.”<sup>78</sup> This was also a problem in the aftermath of the Fisher- Beresford dispute, during which Fisher had been accused of “espionage” on senior officers. When he was First Sea Lord, Fisher had encouraged junior officers to write him personally about conditions in

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<sup>75</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8423/157; and PRO, ADM 156/185.

<sup>76</sup> PRO, ADM 116/862, Slade Report on War College, 1913, 12.

<sup>77</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/26, Notes on Slade Committee, February 1914, 13.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.



the various squadrons and fleets.<sup>79</sup> Not only was it possible that a wiseacre junior officer would be placed in a situation of criticising his chief but also that this officer might be an agent of Admiralty “espionage” to check up on a commander-in-chief. Senior officers also feared that this corps of officers would receive special favour from London and hence not be under the sway of the patronage of the flag officer. This was not an idle concern during the Fisher years.<sup>80</sup> Further, many saw this as evidence of the Admiralty attempting to centralize power in its own hands.

Other senior officers in a squadron would also resent staff officers since they would be placed in a situation that they would be drafting orders in the name of the commander. Senior executive officers, captains and commanders, already subject to the limitations on their authority outlined in the previous chapters, would be receiving orders from their juniors. This was complicated by the Admiralty’s attempt to remove the consideration of rank in selecting staff officers. As David Beatty wrote, “[i]t would be fatal if the value of the opinions of the several members of the Staff were officially assessed in direct proportion to the amount of gold lace on their sleeves.”<sup>81</sup> Beatty argued that staff should be organized in such a way that an officer filled a certain role regardless of rank or seniority and specialized staff officers would be graded by their training without reference to practical experience, rank nor seniority. Consequently, officers like

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<sup>79</sup> R.S. Bacon, *The Life of Fisher of Kilverstone* (2 vols., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929), II, 110-111; the most infamous case was that of Captain Reginald Bacon in 1906 who had served as Fisher’s Naval Assistant was a battleship captain in the Mediterranean Fleet under Beresford. In private letters, Bacon had expressed criticism of Beresford.

<sup>80</sup> Fisher was frequently accused of foisting his favourites onto the staff of senior officers in order to keep tabs of their activities. See, Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I, 76-87.

<sup>81</sup> PRO, CAB 1/31, pt.3, Memorandum, Naval War Staff, 1911.

Wilson argued that the Navy afloat would have little but contempt for these officers: "The Service would have the most supreme contempt for any body of officers who professed to be specially trained to think. There is no Service where there is more thinking done but officers are judged by what they can do when afloat."<sup>82</sup>

Consequently, the staff course was to assist in providing an antidote to the inappropriate conduct of staff officers. Indeed, two of the most important skills taught were tact and humility.

We are all entitled to our own opinions, and it may be in the interests of the Service that we should express those opinions when they differ from those of our Chief, but what we have to ensure is that such differences of opinion are never divulged to others whom they do not concern. The Staff advises and the Command decides, and, that decision having been made, it is the job of the Staff Officer to eliminate any idea of disagreement that there may be from his mind and throw himself whole-heartedly and loyally into the task of transmitting that decision into execution.<sup>83</sup>

Since officially and culturally it was assumed that the officers who had a multiple stripes on their sleeves were more experienced and efficient than inferiors, this was a hard pill to swallow. Not only did the staff system threaten the prerogatives of senior officers in the exercise of command but also the importance of rank and seniority.

The idea of having a staff was also resisted because many believed that there was an intellectual and cultural need to differentiate naval officers from their army counterparts.<sup>84</sup> As was explained in chapter V, the art of seamanship was given an

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<sup>82</sup> CCAC, CHAR 21/21, Memorandum by Admiral Sir Arthur K. Wilson, 30 October 1911.

<sup>83</sup> PRO, ADM 203/69, Introductory Lecture on Staff Work by Captain E. Astley-Rushton, 1924.

<sup>84</sup> Cynthia F. Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), 57-76.

inordinately high status in the training and thought of naval officers. An emphasis on seamanship demonstrated the importance of the command element and worked to centralize power and authority in such a way as to place near dictatorial authority in the hands of the captain. A naval officer, trained to handle the perilous sea, was deemed to possess judgement, skill and daring; any move to circumscribe his authority was suspect and was seen as politicising the service. The cult of “practical” sea training created the atmosphere of centralized control, as Major G.S. Ollivant explained in 1914:

Here we have a system evolved by, and suited to, the specialized conditions of a peculiar and particular organism – a battleship. The small close order compact armies of the time of Frederick the Great were units of a roughly analogous nature, and we find, as might be expected, somewhat similar methods employed for controlling them. Under different conditions, those methods proved useless and failed.<sup>85</sup>

Arthur Wilson was even more of an arch-centralizer than Fisher, and he jealously guarded his personal power to make war plans to ensure secrecy. The proto-staff that Fisher established in 1909 called the War Council ceased for all intents and purposes to exist after Wilson became First Sea Lord in 1910.<sup>86</sup> Pointing to the differences between the conduct of operations in the Army and Navy, Wilson argued that the staff system was intended to impose a structure devised for the Army onto the Admiralty. Since naval vessels, unlike armies, were self-contained and self-propelled, their commanders had little concern for lines of communication. Wilson held that organization in the exercise of command was comparatively simple for naval forces. Further, as navies were at sea and

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<sup>85</sup> PRO, CAB 31/1, Memorandum by GS Ollivant, 25 May 1914.

<sup>86</sup> Herbert King-Hall, *Naval Memories and Traditions* (London: Hutchinson, 1928), 218; “As it was, under Sir John Fisher it [the War Staff], like the seed sown on stony ground, flourished for a time, and soon after, under Sir John’s success, under Sir Arthur Wilson, it withered and died, for, whereas, Sir John suckled the infant on skim-milk, Sir Arthur denied it even that nourishment, and starved it to death.”

constantly experiencing war-like conditions, a department devoted to speculative thought was superfluous. "The Navy has learned by long experience thoroughly to distrust all paper schemes that have not been submitted to the supreme test of trial under practical conditions by the Fleet at sea..."<sup>87</sup>

Much of this opposition was recognized by a former D.N.I., Rear Admiral Edmond Slade: "They miss the main point, which is not how an army or a fleet is to be moved, but why it is to be moved at all."<sup>88</sup> Slade argued that Wilson's ideas conflated the roles of command and supply, a situation that did not meet the need that the staff had been intended to fill. In fact, a primary preoccupation of all the advocates of the staff system of command, from Spencer Wilkinson onwards, was the necessity to separate routine functions from the higher aspects of direction.<sup>89</sup> Naval officers in this period were not generally renowned for the efficient use of staff resources, since staffs were generally small and few senior officers had been effectively trained to use them. For these reasons it is not surprising that by 1914 the system failed to live up to expectations. As Richmond commented in January 1917, "Jellicoe is wholly ignorant of the meaning of the word 'staff' or of staff work. He, like Leveson, imagines that it is clerical work, writing minutes & so on."<sup>90</sup>

In some respects, therefore, Wilson was right all the way down the line. The staff became what he had envisioned in 1911: a mere auxiliary carrying out routine functions.

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<sup>87</sup> CCAC, CHAR 21/20, Memorandum by Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, October 1911.

<sup>88</sup> PRO, CAB 1/31, pt 3, "Proposed Draft Memorandum to Issued to the Board," 1911.

<sup>89</sup> Spenser Wilkinson, *The Brain of the Navy* (London: Constable, 1895).

<sup>90</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 229.

This was especially the case when the Admiralty tried to direct a global war effort with what was, in some respects, a pre-industrial command structure. Some reformers had regarded the Naval Staff as a kind of “magic bullet;” once the reforms had taken hold, the problem would largely fix itself. But the problem the corps ran into was the limitations in the education of naval officers that nearly precluded them from adopting a view wider than the constellation of shipboard life which had been promoted throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the policy of making staff officers merely another specialized group and a sort of uniformed vested interest left things in a rather parlous state. The “principles of war” training advocated by the Slade Committee in 1913 did not really address the emphasis on material matters. As Haig observed,

Speaking generally these initial paragraphs suggest the idea that in order to have an efficient body of officers it is only necessary to bring “the principles of war” to the attention to the naval officer’s notice every now and then – “at successive periods” – instead of insisting that his every thought and action throughout his career is based on them.<sup>91</sup>

At the War College, lectures placed a heavy emphasis on matters such as international law and court martial procedures, with history added as an afterthought. To make matters worse, the College was not considered to be of great importance by either the Admiralty or officers themselves : officers were regularly taken off the course in favour of sea commands and on occasion men who were not intended for further employment were sent to Portsmouth at full pay as a form of compensation to ensure that “Buggins” got his share. Only with the establishment of the Staff College did this change. The focus of training switched to attempting to get officers to think for themselves and to

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<sup>91</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/26, Notes on the Report on the Committee on the Organization and Training on the RN War College, February 1914.

take responsibility for learning subjects outside their purview as junior officers.<sup>92</sup> Attempts at getting officers to study “voluntary” subjects had not been terribly successful in the past, as the different education committees had discovered. Hence, it was unlikely that a group of brilliant officers would quickly be able to apply staff methods at the Admiralty. There was simply not enough time. In other words, the entire culture of the service needed to be readjusted to value staff work and “intellectual” pursuits. Despite the best intentions of some officers and the civil leadership of the Admiralty, it was impossible to impose this change from above in a short a time.

Indeed, Churchill was so unimpressed with the intellectual abilities of senior officers that he wrote an extraordinary letter to Asquith when it came time to replace Ernest Troubridge as the first Chief of Staff in 1913. Troubridge had to get his sea time or be passed over for promotion to Vice Admiral. “I have now made the acquaintance of all the principal officers of the Navy serving at home, and I am sorry to say that I cannot find one who possesses fully the qualities necessary for this most important post.”<sup>93</sup>

The war staff system was required afloat as well as at the Admiralty. Staff officers in the fleet commands had to work in concert with the staffs of squadrons and divisions. Further, Churchill argued that the individual commander-in-chief must not be permitted to organize the staff in his own fashion. The highest authorities alone must establish staff organization. Further, a manual was to be prepared to ensure universal procedures for

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<sup>92</sup> PRO, ADM 203/69, Memorandum by Vice Admiral, Royal Naval War College, 12 January 1912.

<sup>93</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/12, Churchill to Asquith, 15 August 1913.

writing operational orders, collecting intelligence information, and establishing supply systems.

Such Manuals never supersede individual judgment in emergencies and can never be pleaded in defence of unsuccessful operations. They are indispensable, however, if a common body of doctrine, considered and accepted by the service as a whole, is to take the place of the present loose, uncertain, and anarchic methods.<sup>94</sup>

In the event of a senior commanding officer being superseded suddenly, a common language and command method need to be preserved. Considering the rapid turnover of officers in the years before the war, this was especially critical.<sup>95</sup>

There were also some questions as to whether the bulk of the Navy's senior officers were hostile to the staff system. The problem came back again to the shortage of officers and the inability to drag them away from sea duty to undergo the requisite staff training. As Battenberg wrote in 1914, "I fear the dearth of Officers will only permit of a very small beginning to be made in short courses for Lieutenants." But he added in red pen that the training course, "[t]his seems to me to be vital to the efficiency of the Navy."<sup>96</sup>

Haig criticized the Staff Training Course in February 1914 and directed an attack on the idea that staff training was "theoretical" as opposed to practical.

Again almost all aspects of the art of war are 'theoretical' in time of peace; they only become 'practical' when the actual killing begins. The practical man is the man with a strong imagination ... The most dangerous enemies of any fighting machine in time of peace are not

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<sup>94</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/22b, Churchill to First and Second Sea Lords, 31 August 1913.

<sup>95</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/29, Churchill to Battenberg, 2 February 1914.

<sup>96</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8377/118, Memorandum on Military Education and war staff training, 9 May 1914.

the ‘theorists’ who imagine things, but the men who either have no imagination at all or whose imagination leads them off on illogical ... lines.<sup>97</sup>

The education of staff officers was radically different from any curriculum put forward in the history of the service. For the first time the Admiralty embraced the idea of promoting freedom of thought and discussion without regard to rank or experience. This prepared the ground for another reform, the introduction of *The Naval Review*. Indeed, at the War College in 1912 a group of officers under the loose leadership of Captain Herbert Richmond, and heavily influenced by the work of Julian Corbett, sparked off *The Review*. Once this freedom of expression was granted and officially endorsed, it was impossible to arrest. *The Review* gave space to junior officers to advance fresh ideas and methods. Indeed, many senior officers saw it as a safety valve that would restrain dissidents from writing in the popular press. In the words of Admiral Sir Arthur Moore:

Strong views on many of the subjects are held by many young officers who do not wish to come into conflict of opinion with the senior officers, & by means of the *Review* they should be able to avoid doing so and yet give the benefit of fresh thought... at the same time the experience of the older men will be conveyed to them in a kindly manner that will steady their judgements and develop their reasoning.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> CCAC, CHAR 13/26, Notes on the Report of the Committee on the Organisation and Training of the Royal Naval War College, February 1914 by Douglas Haig, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Royal Naval Museum (RNM), Naval Review Papers (NRP), Admiral Sir Arthur Moore to Henderson, 27 February 1913.



### *The Naval Review*

One of the fundamental problems affecting the development of the staff system was the adoption of strategic and tactical doctrine across the Navy. Since the new staff would in essence be the brain of the service and would inculcate it, regardless of the particular commander, it was imperative that some sort of check be introduced to ensure that doctrine would proceed along the correct lines. Indeed, disagreement over strategic doctrine between the so-called historical and the materialist schools brought about the explosion that required the development of the staff. Moreover, it was vital that the staff not become merely an organ for an aggressive First Sea Lord to impose his will on the rest of the Navy. Some mechanism was required to act as a check and to ensure that the legitimacy of doctrine could be upheld, questioned or rejected in a forum of impeccable professionalism with an absence of malice or axe grinding. One such forum was *The Naval Review*. Although James Goldrick has argued that the initial goal of the Naval Society was to educate junior officers rather than to challenge doctrine or policy, there was more to it than this.<sup>99</sup> While Goldrick might well be correct, at least in part, the message officers took from this publication was to take nothing for granted and to develop their own critical faculties. Hence, it provided the intellectual tools and space to discuss ideas that were formerly the preserve of senior officers. As many of the junior officers were future staffers, they would be in positions of influence. *The Review* was

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<sup>99</sup> James Goldrick, "The Irresistible Force and the Immovable Object: *The Naval Review*, the Young Turks, and the Royal Navy, 1911-1931," in James Goldrick and John Hattendorf (eds.) *Mahan is Not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1993), 83.

unconnected to the power structure of the Navy, and its content was initially subject only to the discretion of the editor, Admiral William H. Henderson, and a select group of officers who acted as a sort of editorial committee. These included Richmond and Commanders Reginald Plunkett and Kenneth Dewar.

*The Review* was to provide a vehicle not merely to amplify or expound ideas and policies for the staff or the First Lord but for officers regardless of rank or experience to put forward their ideas before their peers. As Richmond wrote in his diary: “*Mais lorsque l’on discute, il n’y a plus ni supérieur, ni inférieur, ni titre, ni âge, ni nom: rien ne compte que la vérité, devant elle tout le monde est égal.*”<sup>100</sup> Officers were encouraged to write and were treated kindly by Henderson, who resolutely defended the principle that all contributions could be anonymous.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, *The Review*, unlike *RUSI*, was independent of Admiralty funding; the subscribers bore the full cost of editing, printing and shipping. Henderson carried out the editorial work in his London home and office expenses were minimal. Initial subscriptions were £1, but as membership grew it were possible to cut the cost to ten shillings.

Henderson was careful to use his political and social contacts to further the interests and subscription base of the journal and to ensure that it received at least official notice by senior officers. By March 1915, membership included three Sea Lords, the Director of Naval Intelligence, Jellicoe and his staff, Beatty, four of the five rear admirals

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<sup>100</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 20; diary entry from March 1911. “But during discussion, there is no superior, no inferior, no rank, no age, no name: nothing counts but truth and before that everyone is equal.”

<sup>101</sup> Indeed, the authorship of the articles of *The Naval Review* from 1913 to 1931 was unavailable until the publication of a list in *Mahan is Not Enough* in 1993.

of cruiser squadrons, four of the six home port commanders, four foreign station commanders, and Churchill and six prominent civilians, including three Cabinet ministers.<sup>102</sup> In an undated letter to Prime Minister Asquith, Henderson wrote that “[i]t [*The Naval Review*] is one of the results of your action in encouraging the formation of a Naval War Staff, and is essential if our Command in War is to be able to compete with that of other nations who pay more attention to these matters than we... have done.”<sup>103</sup> Total membership reached 1000 by mid-1915.<sup>104</sup>

*The Review* was to provide a mechanism to correct command and administration in a way that made it safe to contribute and safe for the Admiralty to take on board its suggestions. Its rules of anonymity protected individual writers from official or other reprisals and also protected the authorities from immoderate and partisan criticism by the fact of its restricted circulation. Aside from prominent civilians like Cabinet Members, and individuals such as Julian Corbett, it was open only to active service officers of either the Army or Navy, and members were cautioned to take proper care of their copies and to ensure that no material was used as a form of political propaganda or appeared in the press.

**Members are therefore requested to undertake that they will take proper care of their copies, that they will not allow them or their contents to be communicated to any person not eligible for membership or to the Press; and that they will take every precaution against their being available or used for any political or propagandist purpose.**<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> RNM, NRP, Membership List, March 1915.

<sup>103</sup> RNM, NRP, Henderson to Asquith, n.d.

<sup>104</sup> Goldrick, “Irresistible Force,” 89.

<sup>105</sup> “Regulations of *The Naval Review*,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), bold in original.

The purpose of *The Review* from the outset was to debate broad aspects of policy and to refrain from the discussion of materiel or technology. Hence, it was meant to act as a secure forum in which to question and to suggest policy reforms while ensuring, as far as possible, that it remained free from political intrigue and preserved the freedom of contributors.

Officers at the leading edge of reform constantly complained that the Admiralty was out to get them. In fact, there is little evidence that this was so. However, a certain chill seemed to come over the Navy during the war as secrecy became much more stringent (and continued to be so after the war). For instance, the detailed reports on the Navy that were published in the *Parliamentary Papers* suddenly ceased after 1918. The chill in the atmosphere was likely designed to preserve the reputation of the Navy, and the executive branch in particular, when the Admiralty was fighting for every farthing in the annual estimates. Indeed, Richmond complained bitterly, “there is no channel at all in which an Officer can express his ideas except the *RUSI*; and that is so under the heels of the Admiralty that is of very little use.”<sup>106</sup> The situation was also complicated, as Captain Henry Shore indicated, by the fact that London was not the centre of naval activity, which made it difficult for officers to participate. A more fruitful location would have been Portsmouth.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> NMM, K.G.B. Dewar Papers (DEW) 34/, Richmond to Dewar, 13 June 1911.

<sup>107</sup> Henry Shore, “Mental Sterility Afloat,” *United Service Magazine*, XXXII (March 1906), 613.

From the 1860s onwards, the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* provided opportunity for even relatively junior officers to contribute to policy discussions, subject to Admiralty control. Indeed, the contents of *RUSI* throughout the nineteenth century provide a rich source for the historian. Further, the publication of post-lecture discussions gives insight into the thinking of the officer corps. However, after the Fisher reforms in 1904, *RUSI* fell silent on core naval affairs, and in view of the controversies afflicting the service, the editorial committee elected to shift the focus away from controversial topics. Pressure was applied by Fisher to have *RUSI* take a more low-key approach. Further, there does not appear to be a single discussion at which Fisher was present or contributed. Other luminaries of the service, like Charles Beresford, Gerard Noel and P.H. Colomb, were regular attendees at such lectures. *RUSI* was dependent to some degree on Admiralty funding, and pressure from Whitehall, subtle or otherwise, could not be ignored.<sup>108</sup>

The Admiralty also had complete control over any information in a lecture or paper written by naval officers on the active list. Since *RUSI* was in the legal sense a publication, active officers had to submit papers through their commanding officers to the Admiralty for vetting before approval for publication. Controversial topics could therefore be suppressed quite handily. An example of this involved Carylson Bellairs, who had in 1893 submitted a paper for *RUSI* that the Admiralty had deemed unsuitable for publication. This decision led to questions about Admiralty policy in Parliament, where

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<sup>108</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. CLXXII (1907), col. 1090. The Admiralty made a financial contribution of £375 per annum and articles submitted for publications were vetted by the Admiralty which, of course, meant Fisher in this period.

Thomas Gibson Bowles, M.P. for King's Lynn, asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, U. Kay-Shuttleworth, why permission had been denied after Bellairs had gained the approval of Admiral Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton to go forward with his paper. Of course, Kay-Shuttleworth refused to answer other than to say that Bellairs had been refused on the grounds of Article 682 of the Queen's Regulations, which gave the Admiralty the authority to suppress any paper submitted for publication by an active officer.<sup>109</sup> A Gold Medal paper written for *RUSI* in 1913 by K.G.B. Dewar on the development of a naval staff was also suppressed.

An officer who wrote an unorthodox paper or questioned Admiralty policy was exposed to possible retribution when the half-yearly promotion lists were drafted or an issue arose over where an officer was to be posted. The unparalleled bitterness of the feuds within the Navy at the time muzzled debate and discussion. This was why the founders of *The Naval Review* and Henderson steadfastly maintained the anonymity of contributors to that journal. Even under severe Admiralty pressure to identify the author of a critical article about the *Goeben* fiasco, Henderson refused to reveal his name. Rear Admiral F.W. Kennedy eventually claimed responsibility, thereby earning the enmity of the Board. It was indeed remarkable how far the Admiralty would go to defend the reputation of an Admiral who no longer had one.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. XIX (1893), col. 644.

<sup>110</sup> RNM, NRP; and PRO, ADM 156/178. The proceedings against Kennedy were based on a complaint by Admiral Sir Archibald Berkeley Milne who had been Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet in 1914. Kennedy had written his article immediately after the event and had deposited a copy in his bank in the event of his death. See, Brian Schofield, "'Jacky' Fisher, H.M.S. *Indomitable* and the Dogger Bank Action: A Personal Memoir," in Gerald Jordan (ed.), *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1945: Essays in Honour of Arthur Marder* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 66.

As Richmond wrote Henderson in July 1913, when the latter had suggested offering a membership in the Naval Society to the First Lord:

I think you might point out that you have the advantages in finding out what the thoughts of the rising generation is, which are not possessed by the officers on the active list with whom he comes in contact. THEY don't hear the ideas that are simmering among the younger men. A great wave is at present in progress, due largely to the writings of Corbett, and to discussions at the War College.<sup>111</sup>

The idea of the formation of a professional journal for naval officers was not new in 1912. RUSI had been publishing a monthly journal since the mid-nineteenth century, and various other commercial service papers continued to appear. The problems with the commercial journals such as the *United Service Magazine* and the *Naval and Military Record* were that they had become too political in their orientation, plus the rancour left over from the Fisher era weakened their capacity to act as honest brokers. Further, since they were publications, officers could not freely write for them under their own names without Admiralty permission. *RUSI* itself was increasingly barren of naval topics, as the Admiralty exerted pressure by not permitting certain officers, such as Bellairs and Dewar, to speak.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> NMM, H.W. Richmond Papers (RIC) 7/1, Richmond to Henderson, 23 July 1913.

<sup>112</sup> A perusal of the issues of *RUSI* from 1900 to 1914 reveals a distinct lack of naval topics compared to the earlier period where officers like P.H. Colomb, Gerard Noel, C.C.P. Fitzgerald, Richard Vesey Hamilton and other were constantly to be found. See also PRO, ADM 1/8317, Memorandum on Publications, 2 March 1912: "For some years no encouragement whatever had been held out to Naval Officers to express their views on general questions & as a consequence very few officers on the active list have written papers for the service magazines or taken part in the lectures & proceedings of the RUS Institution..." Even after the war, *RUSI* seemed to have difficulty attracting naval officers to make contributions, see RNM, NRP, "The Status of the Naval Society and its Naval Review," by Captain T. Dannreuther, 1922.

In the 1870s a brief attempt was made to introduce a paper exclusively by and for junior officers under the editorship of Lieutenant Hubert Grenfell, but it quickly folded when it failed to gain a wide audience in the corps and incurred the displeasure of the Board.<sup>113</sup> According to Captain T. Dannreuther, he was asked by Fisher to establish a correspondence paper for junior officers in 1902, but as a junior lieutenant he considered it improper.<sup>114</sup> When the Army General Staff was created, a journal entitled *The Army Review*, designed as a forum of discussion for all officers, was published under its auspices. But it was not intended as a regular publication, rather as a printed correspondence society with a closed circulation. In similar fashion, when Winston Churchill established the Naval War Staff it was suggested that a joint Army and Navy review be published; the naval editor was to be Captain Mark Kerr, Assistant to the Admiral Commanding Reserves. However, the discussions came to naught, even though the Admiralty managed to extract £250 from the Treasury when Kerr argued for an additional £50 per annum. The Admiralty wanted an active list officer to act as an editor so that effective control over the journal's content could be maintained and refused to seek additional monies from the Treasury on the grounds that Kerr might shortly be going to sea, where it would be impossible to exercise editorial control. "A strict censorship on the hands of a responsible Officer would be a *sine-qua-non*, in view of the large number of highly confidential naval subjects..."<sup>115</sup> At any rate, it was obvious that the commitment of the Admiralty was minimal. As Colonel Charles à Court Repington, the

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<sup>113</sup> *The Journal of the Junior Professional Naval Officers' Association*.

<sup>114</sup> RNM, NRP, Memorandum by Dannreuther, 1922.

<sup>115</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8317, Memorandum by Rear Admiral David Beatty, 14 February 1912.



editor of *The Army Review*, wrote to the Admiralty, “I quite see that from your point of view it will be easier to put the thing through if it can be shown that it costs nothing, but really, with the combined estimates of 71 millions, a charge of a few hundred pounds for the improvement of the higher leading & for the development of intellectual progress seem to me not worth cavilling at.”<sup>116</sup>

What happened instead was that a group of middle-level officers studying at the War College at Portsmouth, under the loose direction of Captain Herbert Richmond, decided to establish a correspondence society quite independent of the Admiralty. They quickly gained the attention and services of Admiral William H. Henderson, who in the 1870s had been a member of the Junior Naval Officers Professional Association (JNPA), which had itself sponsored a journal, and who realized that if such a forum were to survive it required a much wider audience than merely junior officers. Henderson wisely sought to use his contacts in the upper reaches of the service and politics to read and support the enterprise. The foundations of the journal rested on a complete separation between the Admiralty and editorial content. Initially this posed little difficulty, and the popularity and appeal of the journal dramatically increased its influence.

The pre-war volumes of *The Review* relied on contributions from a relatively small number of prolific authors. Of the thirty-four articles in the first volume, either Henderson or members of his unofficial board including Herbert Richmond and Reginald Plunkett wrote fifteen. Gradually, however, the authorship base was widened.<sup>117</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>116</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8312, Colonel Repington to Vincent Baddeley, March 1912.

<sup>117</sup> Goldrick and Hattendorf (eds.), *Mahan is Not Enough*, 342-343.

in the first decade more than lieutenants wrote one third of the articles, a significantly greater number than any previous service journal since the Junior Naval Officers' Professional Association's journal in the 1870s. Only occasionally did officers so junior grace the pages of *RUSI* or any of the other papers. While *some officers saw The Review* as a threat, for the most part the official attitude was that it acted as a safety valve that did no harm. Still, there was some concern that confidential information would leak from the journal to the press, or worse, to the Navy's potential rivals. The Superintendent at Chatham, Captain H. Dalton, though, expressed the opinion that it was impossible for *The Review* to function without discussing matters that should not be permitted in print.<sup>118</sup>

After the war began in 1914, it did not take long for the editor of *The Review* to run afoul of the Admiralty over some of the material that was printed. In a series of articles discussing the Falklands episode of December 1914,<sup>119</sup> sparked by a complaint by Jellicoe, the Admiralty outlined its concerns in an interview between the Secretary, Sir W. Graham Greene, and Henderson at the end of May 1915. The Secretary was concerned that since some members of the Society were civilians, there would be considerable difficulty in controlling access to the material. Indeed, in a later communication, it was noted that there were eleven civilian members, but that all were either current or former Cabinet members, ex-naval officers or senior secretarial staff in the Admiralty.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> RNM, NRP, Captain H. Dalton to Henderson, 22 June 1913.

<sup>119</sup> In December 1914, a squadron under the command of Rear Admiral Doveton Sturdee caught a German force under Admiral Graf von Spee off the Falkland Islands.

<sup>120</sup> RNM, NRP, Henderson to Graham Green, 4 June 1915. See also PRO, ADM 1/8423/157, Censorship of articles for *The Naval Review* Magazine, October 1915.

## Conclusion

The process whereby the executive officer corps attempted to redefine itself in a fashion acceptable to the rising concerns of middle-class professionals was amply demonstrated by the institution of a Naval War Staff in 1912 and the foundation of a professional journal for executive officers in that same year. Their point of origin was not a coincidence. Both institutions were a response to the changing demands of the naval officer's workplace. Similarly, both institutional changes were widely resented, and some regarded them merely as tools to reassert the professional competence of the executive branch in the face of concerted criticism inside and outside the naval service. However, both the foundation of the staff and the appearance of *The Naval Review* went beyond merely supporting the pretension of the executive elite. While accepting executive predominance, forward-thinking officers pointed out that position had to be earned by extending formal professional qualifications to traditional command and authority within the service. If science and scientific history were to be the cornerstones of a strategy to retain primacy, it had to be made real and provide enough social, cultural and intellectual currency to win acceptance in wider British society.

The resistance of the older generation of officers was based on the assertion of traditional command (although it was of fairly recent origin) and was no longer tenable in a navy that was undergoing revolutionary change, not merely in machinery and technology but also in its internal social arrangements. It was no longer thought to be adequate to consider command the natural prerogative of a gentlemanly elite, and the concept that officers were "born and bred" was under increasing attack in an age when the power of the landed establishment was being shaken to its core. The capitulation of

the Lords, Irish Home Rule and the Unionist revolt demonstrated that the old order was evolving into a new paradigm in British politics and society. Aspirations and assertions of the power of command had to be accompanied by structural changes that acquired legitimacy outside the naval service. The increased popularity and deep concern over the development of naval policy redoubled pressure on the executive branch to be worthy of trust. More money could be spent and more dreadnoughts could be built, but that money and the will to construct such a fleet came at a high price. Increased oversight and a developing chasm between the reality of a changing Britain and the traditional officer corps had to be reconciled with the concrete security needs of the nation. Traditional views of command were the first casualty in this cultural shift. But traditional command was merely wounded, and it survived beyond the Great War, albeit in a highly modified form. These reforms put the officer corps on notice that to pursue policies and to preserve institutional peculiarities in defiance of evolving trends was a road to weakened authority.

Two key elements in the self-conscious professionalization of the executive officer corps in the years between the resignation of Fisher and the outbreak of war in 1914 were the struggle over the establishment of a Naval War Staff and the publication of *The Naval Review* as a forum for free discussion between naval officers, regardless of rank. Both were in some respects threats to the established order. The Naval Staff did not threaten traditional-minded executive officers because of its efficiency or because it was new and therefore of dubious importance. Instead, the staff system was widely resented because it implied a circumventing of command and a reduction in the power of the commander. It threatened, in the minds of many, to turn the commander from the conductor of naval operations into a mere cog in the machine of British naval policy.

Moreover, this change was very much in step with the development of professional management in large industrial enterprises. The same sorts of difficulties in British industry in developing these new managerial methods also served as barriers to the grafting of staff systems onto the Royal Navy. The desire for personal responsibility and for personal control over the allocation of resources hampered the change to managerial/staff organization.<sup>121</sup> The personal connections which were so important in maintaining the stability and cohesiveness of the naval officer corps began to break down not only with the growth in the size of the Navy but also with the nearly geometric growth in complexity. The staff system was an attempt to subject strategic planning to management and reflected a switch from personal rule to collective management.

*The Naval Review* was also seen as a threat to the competence of senior officers. All commissioned officers, regardless of rank and with complete anonymity, could challenge the views of the senior men in the Navy. Such a journal threatened to expose professional weakness. It also provided an avenue for dissent that could be widely disseminated throughout the service, that one was beyond the control of hierarchy and the Admiralty administration. Indeed, once war was declared in 1914, it did not take long for protests to reach the ears of the Admiralty regarding the impropriety of *The Naval Review*. In 1915, at the instigation of Jellicoe, the journal was suppressed until the end of the war, and thereafter the Board of Admiralty officially controlled it. Nonetheless, *The*

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<sup>121</sup> See Alfred D. Chandler, "The Growth of the Transnational Industrial Firm in the United States and the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis," *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, XXXIII, No. 3 (August 1980), 396-410.

*Review*, in its capacity as a mechanism for discussion, was a necessary contribution to the professionalization of the Navy.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See, Allan R. Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army, 1881-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 4-5. "If there is to be criticism and doubting, it must be internalised by formal peer-group action or subtle informal sanctions."

## Chapter IX

### *“Auxillium ab Alto”*<sup>1</sup> – The Experience of War

War is not a very exhilarating business when we have no confidence in the high command.<sup>2</sup>

I am getting in the habit of writing perhaps more freely than I ought to. I write in haste, sometimes with no knowledge of a situation beyond our own view of it, so if I write too much please make allowance for my Celtic temperament. I know that you will use them, as I write them, only for the good of the Service – or rather for the good of the Country, which comes before the Service.<sup>3</sup>

In his February 1914 critique of the Slade Report, Douglas Haig expressed deep unease with the capacity of the Admiralty and its nascent War Staff to manage and direct major combat operations. Indeed, he concluded his memorandum by arguing that while proposed reforms put forward by the Committee to redress this defect were being implemented, “...we should, presumably, be careful to steer clear of any wars.”<sup>4</sup> Yet barely six months later the country was engaged in the greatest conflict in its history.

Unfortunately for the executive officer corps, Haig’s ominous assessment was accurate. Even though the Navy was largely successful in the execution of its strategic tasks in securing British maritime communications and restricting those of its opponent, it was a near thing. Indeed, in the crucial year of 1917 the Admiralty seemed paralysed in

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<sup>1</sup> E.C. Talbot-Booth, *The Royal Navy: Some Account of Her Manners, Customs and Privileges* (London: Sampson, Low & Co., 1942), 513, motto of H.M.S. *Kellett*, “Help from upon High.”

<sup>2</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), K.G.B. Dewar Papers (DEW) 33/, K.G.B. Dewar to Richmond, 8 June 1916.

<sup>3</sup> NMM, H.W. Richmond Papers (RIC) 7/4, R. Plunkett to Richmond, 18 December 1914.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), Chartwell Papers (CHAR) 13/26, Notes on the Report of the Slade Report by Douglas Haig, February 1914. See also John Terraine, “The Training of Naval Officers: Lord Haig’s Notes on the Report of the Committee on the Naval War College, 1913,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI)*, CIX (1964), 362.

the face of unrestricted submarine warfare. All the preparations before the war, including the construction of the Grand Fleet's much-vaunted dreadnoughts, seemed futile. The Admiralty's incapacity to use existing naval assets in an effective manner, its inability to defend British commerce on the high seas, and its administrative and operational incompetence also triggered a crisis of confidence. This lack of trust in the capacity of the Admiralty and its staff to conduct operations was expressed in the press and through the War Cabinet. However, most seriously of all, the Admiralty lost the effective confidence of comparatively junior executive officers. This culminated in the embarrassing dismissal of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, arguably the most distinguished officer on the active list, from his post as First Sea Lord in December 1917.<sup>5</sup>

The war provided an even more severe test for the executive officer corps than the rough and tumble of reform in the decade prior to 1914. The argument that naval officers, by virtue of a lifetime of service, were uniquely qualified to exercise the power of command had long provided the trump card that kept interlopers away from professional matters. Not only had officers been trained "scientifically" in the use of the technical means of sea power but also by virtue of historical principles they understood the ends of such power wielded on behalf of the community. Further, to buttress their claims to such authority, and consequently a large proportion of state finance, the officer corps had emphasized the decisiveness of sea power. All the claims to status had to be made good in August 1914. An officer corps might serve several political and social roles in a community, but its position was assured only by its capacity to provide efficient

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<sup>5</sup> See S.W. Roskill, "The Dismissal of Admiral Jellicoe," in W. Laqueur and G.L. Mosse (eds.), *1914: The Coming of the First World War* (New York: Harper, 1966).



leadership in war. This lay at the heart of the three-way contractual relationship between the state, the community and the officer corps that has been a recurring theme in this dissertation.<sup>6</sup> As long as the corps demonstrated its prowess through the successful conduct of operations, its status and power was assured. In the case of the Royal Navy in the Great War, however, this happy arrangement did not last. Not only did the naval war prove to be an immense disappointment professionally for the corps but it also shook the community's confidence in its competence.

First of all, the expectations by officers and the general public of a quick and decisive campaign were dashed when the crucial clash did not come, and the battle that was fought nearly two years later off Jutland had unsatisfactory results. Beatty's battle cruisers were severely mauled and Jellicoe was unable to press his advantage in support of the Battle Cruiser Fleet. The dreadnoughts were also powerless to halt the submarine campaign that nearly strangled the British war effort. Moreover, in the opening months of the war, Jellicoe felt compelled to shift the "all-powerful" Grand Fleet around the British Isles because its bases were not secure. The Dardanelles campaign and a host of other costly blunders exposed the incompetence of many officers, several of whom had been identified as top-flight flag officers before the war. For instance, a former chief of staff at the Admiralty and a former director of the War College were directly involved.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States, 1500-1650* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Rear Admiral Ernest Troubridge was a former Chief of Staff who was tried by court martial for cowardice in the face of the enemy, a capital charge, for the escape of the German battle cruiser *Goeben* in August 1914 and Vice Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly was a former director of the War College who was disgraced by the loss of the battleship *Formidable* in the Channel in the early morning hours of 1 January 1915.

Moreover, the administrative and command arrangements in the Admiralty were inadequate to deal with the realities of modern naval warfare. While organizing and fighting a major war, the Admiralty was constantly restructured to meet growing and shifting demands. This situation was complicated by constant changes in leadership on the political and professional levels, as the Navy went through four Cabinet ministers and five First Sea Lords between October 1914 and December 1917.<sup>8</sup> Even more critical than those changes, the executive officer corps effectively lost control of the agenda at the Admiralty as administrative changes, especially in the critical year of 1917, were imposed by the War Cabinet. Further, one of the highest professional administrative posts on the Board of Admiralty, the Third Sea Lord and Controller, was given to a civilian railway executive, Sir Eric Geddes, who was granted the rank of Vice Admiral by special Order-in-Council.<sup>9</sup> Later in 1917 Geddes was appointed First Lord and set about reorganizing the Admiralty in defiance of the opinion of its professional members.

The constant changes in Admiralty command organization also did little to inspire confidence. As Arthur Pollen remarked, the naval war seemed to lurch from one crisis to the next. Each seemed to result in a change in either the post of First Lord or First Sea Lord and sent public and political confidence even lower.<sup>10</sup> In October 1914, as a result of operational failures, a perceived incapacity to handle Winston Churchill, and because of his German ancestry, Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg was forced to tender his

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>9</sup> Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 1/8489/122, Order in Council granting Vice Admiral rank to Sir Eric Geddes, 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur H. Pollen, "Four Years of Naval War," *Land and Water*, 8 August 1918.

resignation.<sup>11</sup> Due to the failure of the Dardanelles campaign in the spring of 1915 Fisher, who had replaced Battenberg, resigned and brought Churchill down with him. In December 1916 Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, the First Sea Lord, and Arthur Balfour, the First Lord, resigned and were replaced by Jellicoe and Sir Edward Carson. In July 1917 Carson was moved upstairs to the War Cabinet by Lloyd George and replaced with Eric Geddes. Finally, in December 1917 his deputy, Rosslyn Wemyss, succeeded Jellicoe.

Dissatisfaction with the direction of the Admiralty and the Navy in general became widespread in the aftermath of Jutland and reached critical proportions after the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917. By failing to inflict decisive damage on the German High Seas Fleet and the inability to staunch the submarine campaign, the senior leadership of the executive officer corps effectively lost control of strategic policy and the structure of command in Whitehall. Spiralling losses and the despondency of the First Sea Lord triggered systematic attacks in the press, deep apprehension within the War Cabinet and, perhaps most damaging of all, and a rebellion among officers in the fleet. This distrust of the Admiralty machinery resulted in the imposition of a civilian controller, the restructuring of the Staff three times, the dismissal of the Secretary, Sir William Graham Greene, and finally the removal of Jellicoe himself in December 1917.

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<sup>11</sup> In 1917, Battenberg renounced his German title and was created the Marquess of Milford Haven. Also, in a similar fashion to the Royal Family, his surname was changed to a more English-sounding one, Mountbatten. See, PRO, ADM 1/8490/132, Prince Louis of Battenberg – Relinquishing of Titles and Question of New Titles, 1917.

The crux of the problem appeared to be the Admiralty, which was identified as the “Augean stable” that required a Hercules to sort out.<sup>12</sup> Although in the first two years of the war disaffection between the fleet and the Admiralty seemed to grow, in reality it was little different from the tensions that had existed between operational commanders and the administrative centre in the past. Certainly, the relationship between the Admiralty and Beresford when he was Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet was considerably less cordial than that which existed between, say, Jellicoe and the Admiralty when the former was commander of the Grand Fleet.

The reason for the loss of confidence was that the professional leadership of the executive officer corps had failed, or was perceived to have failed, in the execution of its core function: the exercise of command at sea. Whatever the changes in conditions of service, the authority of leadership in combat remained a fallback position, but the war exposed these claims as dubious. The Navy failed tactically at Jutland, strategically at the Dardanelles, and most seriously was unable to deal with the menace of German submarines. In 1917 the leadership of the officer corps had lost the initiative in the organization of the command function in the Admiralty and effectively lost the political battle in Whitehall.<sup>13</sup> Professional expertise that was supposed to be ensured by tighter regulation, higher educational qualifications, courts martial and finally a professional review, were exposed as hollow. This left a group of mid-grade officers who had been

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<sup>12</sup> NMM, RIC 7/4, R. Drax to Richmond, 8 May 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Age of Fisher, 1904-1919* (5 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1959-1974), IV; and A. Temple Patterson, *Jellicoe* (2 vols., London: Macmillan, 1969), 184-189.

aware of many of the defects before the war profoundly frustrated, and as they were deprived of a means to influence policy.

The Admiralty also lost the confidence of powerful sections of the press, in particular the Northcliffe papers, such as the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*, as well as commentators, such as Arthur Pollen, who co-edited the journal *Land and Water* with Hillaire Belloc. As the war was brought home with the institution of rationing in 1917, the Admiralty was subjected to unprecedented scrutiny in everything from strategy, to promotion rules and organization. Unused to dealing with the press and impatient with publicity, Jellicoe had no effective response and lacked Fisher's skill at feeding information to favoured correspondents. Indeed, the Admiralty attempted to censor Pollen, and Jellicoe obtained a legal opinion on whether a libel suit could be levelled against the *Daily Mail*.<sup>14</sup>

Finally and perhaps most seriously, the Admiralty effectively lost the confidence of many officers in the fleet, especially the intellectuals centred on Herbert Richmond.<sup>15</sup> These officers were not shy about using their press and political contacts to push structural reforms that they believed were necessary. With the tacit support of more senior officers, including David Beatty, they felt justified in going outside the chain of command to put forward ideas to save the situation from what they saw as disaster. In Richmond's

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<sup>14</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1805, Correspondence of Geddes, October 1917. See also Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, II, 223-225.

<sup>15</sup> Barry Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871-1946* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 25-39; James Goldrick, "The Irresistible Force and the Immovable Object: *The Naval Review*, the Young Turks, and the Royal Navy, 1911-1931," in James Goldrick and John B. Hattendorf (eds.), *Mahan is not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1993), 83-102; and Donald Schurman, *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 127-129.

words, “I hate this slavish habit of naval officers & this false idea of loyalty, which is generally not loyalty at all, but cowardice.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The War 1914-1916: The Outbreak of War and Expectations**

When Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, the Royal Navy was already mobilized. Many naval officers seemed rather mystified at the immediate causes of the war, as Midshipmen Harold Hickling later related in his autobiography:

I had never heard of the Archduke nor did I know where Sarajevo was; I thought the skipper was pulling our legs. All sorts of heads of state, crowned or otherwise, had been bumped off but no one had gone to war about it. But he was right; the next day Austria declared war on Serbia and soon ultimatums were being handed round the chancelleries of Europe like writs during a Wall Street slump.<sup>17</sup>

Still, for the most part the executive branch welcomed the war in the belief that a quick and decisive victory in the North Sea would remove the threat of the German High Seas Fleet. In this estimation they were not alone, since the general public expected that modern technology and efficient mobilization would quickly ensure victory. As *The Daily Mail* reported on 6 August:

All yesterday London was waiting to know what might be happening in the North Sea. Men and women would stop at their work to sketch little maps and talk eagerly of the probable disposition of the fleets. On the marble-topped tables of restaurants the same maps would be found – clumsy outlines of the coasts of Britain, Holland, Denmark and Norway.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 237, diary entry, 13 March 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Harold Hickling, *Sailor at Sea* (London: William Kimber, 1965), 15.

<sup>18</sup> “Waiting for the Sea Fight,” *Daily Mail*, 6 August 1914.

All the navalist propaganda which had been force-fed to the nation over the previous two decades, along with a facile reading of Mahan, created expectations of a rapid campaign that would result in the fleet destroying its opposite number in pitched battle. The problem, as Wolfgang Wegener wrote after the war, was that the North Sea was strategically dead once both the British and the Germans stood on the strategic defensive.<sup>19</sup> By controlling the exits of the North Sea at Dover and Scapa Flow, the RN effectively cut off German maritime communications without battle.

Not only had the officer corps failed to educate the general public that naval victories were not merely won but required work, it also failed to educate itself about the ends of naval power as opposed to the means. When the great sea battle failed to materialize and the Grand Fleet spent most of its time riding at anchor or conducting periodic sweeps, it was profoundly disappointing. Frustration was rife in both the Grand and Battle Cruiser Fleets over the inaction. It did not take long to blame someone for the trouble, as David Beatty wrote to his wife in September 1914:

This roaming about the North Sea day after day with no prospect of meeting an enemy vessel I think is the heaviest trial that could be laid on any man, added to the which the anxiety of the mine or submarine always present provides a situation which requires the highest forms of philosophy to compete with, to prevent it from clouding one's judgement. Here have I the finest striking force in world, 6 Battle Cruisers and 6 Light Cruisers, and for all we can do, they might be Thames barges... We can never do anything because we are never in the right place. Who at the Admiralty is responsible for one's movements I do not know, but it is not the CinC. He concurs with me. Not a word of this to a soul. I must not criticise. It is most improper,

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<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Wegener, *The Naval Strategy of the World War* (1929, reprint, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 37.

but my digestion, under continual disappointments, is giving way and my temper is becoming damnable.”<sup>20</sup>

Public frustration grew as the army fought while the Navy seemed to be floating aimlessly awaiting the appearance of the High Seas Fleet. In late November, Roger Keyes vented his spleen over public expectations.

People won't realize, though we all do, that we may take a real knock in one place without being able to inflict much loss in return. Dorothy says quite a lot of people say – Pity the Navy isn't doing better – Where would we be without it! I quite admit we ought not to have lost ANY of those cruisers, all the same if my people had been in their place and had had the targets they have had the bag would have been a large one. If critics would take a big map and play a war game– say with 20 cruisers to catch the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* under rules as to visibility – coal, stores, etc. they would realize what it meant.<sup>21</sup>

Further, once the fleet had gone to its war stations, the High Seas Fleet did not come out to fight and German communications were cut, there was the constant urge to use British naval strength for some offensive purpose.<sup>22</sup> As Balfour wrote to Jellicoe in January 1916:

Have you, by the way recently given much thought to a possible naval offensive against Germany in the Baltic or elsewhere? I know the subject was much in your thoughts at one time; but I am not aware whether you have recently been following it up. I hope we should get home some old battleships soon from the Mediterranean; and the young men of your Fleet might devote themselves to a war game in which these might serve as some of the pieces.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> W.S. Chalmers (ed.), *The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), 176, Beatty to his wife, 21 September 1914.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Halpern (ed.), *The Keyes Papers* (3 vols., London: Navy Records Society, 1972), I, 53, Keyes to his wife, 21 November 1914.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Jellicoe referred to such pressure as “the six monthly agitation for a naval offensive.” See Patterson, *Jellicoe*, 185.

<sup>23</sup> British Library, Jellicoe Papers, Add. MSS. 48992 folio IV, Balfour to Jellicoe, 17 January 1916.



Further, the war shook naval officers' entire value system and exposed it to ridicule and attack. Courage under fire and the honourable warrior spirit were exposed as fraudulent. As Gordon Campbell related on a visit to the Western Front, in 1917 after he had won his Victoria Cross:

The inhumanity and stupidity of war faced one in all directions. A road map for guidance was useless. Villages ceased to exist. Trees had been withered, and even graveyards had been used for trench lines and vaults as dug outs. I think if more people had seen some of these sights, they would realise the desirability of trying to avoid future wars.

Campbell reported feeling almost ashamed of his VC.<sup>24</sup> Of course others, like Captain Walter Cowan, reportedly enjoyed leaves on the Western Front hoping to see action that had eluded him while commanding a battle cruiser in the North Sea.<sup>25</sup>

As an operations centre, the Naval Staff at the Admiralty was unequal to the task of co-ordinating the naval war. Indeed, as soon as the war broke out it ceased to carry out its functions as laid down in the orders-in-council that had established it. The Sea Lords became heads of department, and co-ordination between those departments became increasingly difficult. As the Dardanelles Commission concluded in 1917, the function of the Board was relegated to the background when it met with decreasing frequency after the outbreak of the conflict.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gordon Campbell, *Number Thirteen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 107.

<sup>25</sup> Lionel Dawson, *The Sound of the Guns: Being an Account of the Wars and Service of Admiral Sir Walter Cowan* (Oxford: Pen in Hand, 1949), 138-140.

<sup>26</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Parliamentary Papers (*BPP*), "First Report of the Dardanelles Commission," 431. While in 1913 the Board met twenty-four times, between August 1914 and May 1915 it met only twelve times, and in November 1915 a collective minute to the First Lord (then

The mobilization of the entire stock of British resources to prosecute the Great War exposed the War Office and the Admiralty to complex and difficult problems. Not the least of these was the recruitment, training and integration of hundreds of thousands of hostilities-only ratings and officers into the Royal Navy. From baseline strength of just under 150,000 men, the Navy had expanded to over 400,000 by the end of the war, yet significantly only 188,000 were regular service personnel.<sup>27</sup> Even essential services, such as the education of young regular officers, were completely disrupted and led to the dispatch of these officers to the University of Cambridge.<sup>28</sup> The discipline and education of young midshipmen in the fleet was unevenly supervised, leading to the runaway growth of bullying and other forms of abuse in the gunroom messes.<sup>29</sup> This reached the point where Jellicoe as Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet issued a circular ordering officers to enforce discipline more rigorously. After further incidence of indiscipline in the gunroom mess in 1917, a Board of Inquiry was convened under Captain Kiddle of H.M.S. *Revenge*, which concluded that inexperience had been a source of complaint for reserve midshipmen:

The Midshipmen, R.N., have entered and brought up together under the discipline of older Cadets and Cadet Captains during their training at Osborne and Dartmouth are more accustomed to be taken charge of and to receive orders from Officers only slightly older than themselves, and they are also familiar by hearsay with Gun Room

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Arthur Balfour) by the junior members of the Board expressed discontent with the dominant position of the First Lord and First Sea Lord.

<sup>27</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8592/131B, Memorial for the Treasury of Personnel Passing through the Royal Navy, 1914-1918.

<sup>28</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8563/203, Naval Officers to be Educated at Cambridge, 1919; and S.W. Roskill, "The Navy at Cambridge, 1919-1923," *Mariner's Mirror*, XLIX, No. 3 (1963), 178-193.

<sup>29</sup> PRO, ADM 156/21, Report of Bullying in Grand Fleet Battleships, 1916.

procedure; whereas the Midshipmen, R.N.R. come into the Service ignorant of the traditions and customs of the Service and of the Gun Room.<sup>30</sup>

The customs of the service could not possibly be at fault. Other midshipmen trumped up a false charge of homosexuality against an unpopular sub-lieutenant.<sup>31</sup> Maintaining discipline proved to be difficult because young midshipmen were permitted to run riot while on shore leave and to behave in a discreditable fashion. Two officers were charged with disorderly conduct after cursing and threatening the owner of a cinema in Invergordon, but they were merely deprived of seniority.<sup>32</sup> The lack of an enforced training programme and supervision over the gunroom mess in heavy ships was another indication of the shortage of regular officers and exposed a serious weakness in the officer training system in times of hostilities.

With the large wartime requirement for officers, skilled ratings and warrant officers, standards of discipline and deference to regular line officers declined. This was particularly the case with reserve and hostilities-only personnel, who accounted for the tremendous increase in courts martial against commissioned officers during the war years. Whereas in 1910-1913 only 187 officers and 619 ratings were tried, during the war the numbers rocketed to 1128 and 1029, respectively. Only just over 300 of the officers charged were regular line officers; and the remainder were reserves.<sup>33</sup> Despite the strain

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<sup>30</sup> PRO, ADM 156/21, Captain Kiddle to Vice Admiral, 1<sup>st</sup> Battle Squadron, 13 January 1917.

<sup>31</sup> PRO, ADM 156/156, Case of Sub Lieutenant John Turner, 1917.

<sup>32</sup> PRO, ADM 156/151, Court Martial of Midshipmen, 1915.

<sup>33</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8556/110, Memorandum on Court Martial Procedure by the Judge-Advocate of the Fleet, 12 April 1919.

of war, naval officers had to spend an almost unprecedented amount of time dealing with legal proceedings. Further, in the case of many reserve officers dealing with the naval service, familiarity with the workings of the regular executive branch bred contempt and intense criticism.<sup>34</sup> In defence of their privileges, particularly in the junior ranks, regular officers were more careful of their status; service in auxiliary squadrons was to be avoided.<sup>35</sup>

Executive command in the Admiralty was exercised through the War Staff Group that Churchill established at the outbreak of war. Its membership included the First Lord, First Sea Lord, Chief of Staff and Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson. This group had no real organization and tended to reflect the personality of the dominant member, usually Churchill. Hence, command decisions were effectively separated from both the Board and the Naval Staff. Every single member of the War Group, save Churchill, were generally unenthusiastic about the naval staff system and seemed quite unable to fathom the benefits that might accrue. Wilson, who had been brought back as an unpaid adviser, opposed the naval staff from the start, and his removal from the post of First Sea Lord was a direct result of that opposition. Fisher, despite his frequent advocacy for a staff system, thought it excellent for everyone but himself. As he told Corbett at one point when the historian pressed him on the issue of staff command, “An effete First Sea Lord

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<sup>34</sup> Sydney Moseley, *The Fleet from Within: Being the Impressions of a R.N.V.R. Officer* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1919), 11-12.

<sup>35</sup> PRO, Ministry of Transport Papers (MT) 23/688, Case of Lieutenant Commander J.A. Rogers, RNR, 1916. Commander Rogers in a rather peremptory fashion ordered a regular RN officer about at Le Havre and the regular officer lodged an official protest.

would be the very devil.”<sup>36</sup> Henry “Dummy” Oliver, the Chief of Staff, was a rigid centralizer who liked to keep control in his own hands, especially when he should have been the linchpin that connected the staff to the operations committee.<sup>37</sup>

Matters were made worse by a combination of secrecy and an apparent willingness to sacrifice operational commanders in order to shore up the reputation of the Admiralty. In the series of disasters that afflicted the Navy in the first months of the war, Admiralty orders were at least in part complicit. In particular, the treatment of Rear Admiral Ernest Troubridge after the failure to catch the German battle cruiser *Goeben* in the Mediterranean contained a warning that operational commanders would be held responsible despite inadequate direction from London.<sup>38</sup>

The Admiralty’s dispositions often left commanders afloat in parlous situations. After the loss of Cradock’s squadron off Coronel in November 1914, Beatty bitterly opposed the needless withdrawal of battle cruisers to hunt down von Spee.<sup>39</sup> Although two vessels were sent to the Falklands, two others were sent to the Caribbean in the event that the Germans attempted to use the Panama Canal to break into the Atlantic. This left

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<sup>36</sup> CCAC, J.A. Fisher Papers (FISR) 1/4/191, J.A. Fisher to Julian Corbett, 22 December 1905. See also CHAR 13/2, Fisher to Churchill, 6 November 1911. “Of course the advantage of a Naval War Staff is that the country ain’t ruined if you have a d—d fool as First Sea Lord. If you have a Barham as First Sea Lord he will dominate the War Staff. It never signifies anywhere whether you have a Board or a Committee – the ablest man runs the show!”

<sup>37</sup> Hunt, *Sailor Scholar*, 45; Admiral Sir Henry Oliver recounted the difficulties of keeping up with “two stupid old men and one raving lunatic.”

<sup>38</sup> See, “The Question of Naval Courts Martial,” *Blackwood’s*, CXCVII (April 1915), 530-537.

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, faulty dispositions left Rear Admiral Christopher Cradock in such a state that he was completely inferior in strength to von Spee. H.W. Richmond who was serving as Assistant Director of Operations at the Admiralty blamed Doveton Sturdee, the Chief of Staff. Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 131; as did David Beatty: Bryan Ranft (ed.), *The Beatty Papers* (2 vols., London: Navy Records Society, 1989), I, 174.

Beatty's battle cruiser squadrons seriously weakened in the event of a sortie by the High Seas Fleet. As one officer on his staff wrote: "I look on it as verging on lunacy among those who have *not* had opportunity to study naval strategy, and little better than treason in those who have."<sup>40</sup>

It was also brought home to many officers that the upper echelons of the officer corps were not fully up to their jobs. Many of the operational fiascos were ordered by officers thought to be the best representatives of the naval profession. Rear Admiral Ernest Troubridge had received command of the Mediterranean cruiser squadron after he had served as the War Staff's first Chief of Staff from 1912 to 1914. Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly had served as the Admiral President of the Royal Naval War College at Portsmouth before going to the Channel Fleet and presiding over the loss of *Formidable* on New Years' Day of 1915. Rear Admiral Archibald Moore misread a signal from Beatty's flagship, *Lion*, which had been compelled to drop out of line due to heavy damage, and permitted Hipper's battle cruisers to escape.

Industrialized warfare invariably results in the death and maiming of large numbers of individuals. The Royal Navy and the other services recognized that their activities in war entailed killing and losses. By the necessity of going to sea, naval officers risked their lives in peacetime as well as war. Hardly a *Britannia* term did not suffer the loss of several members through accident, sickness or action. Indeed, the old naval toast, "a bloody war and a sickly season," recognized that the deaths of others could and did often result in the advancement of the survivors. In the case of the Great War, the Royal Navy's manpower losses were relatively light compared to the massive losses

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<sup>40</sup> NMM, RIC 7/4, R. Plunkett to Richmond, 7 January 1915.

sustained by the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) on the Western Front. Indeed, in the entire four years of war, the Navy suffered not many more losses than the Army encountered on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (see Table 9.1).

**Table 9.1 - Royal Navy Losses, 1914-1918**

Casualties	Officers	Men	Total
Killed in Action	2059	20128	22207
Died of other causes	394	10926	11320
Wounded in Action	805	4072	4877
Wounded non Action		313	313
Prisoner of War	179	726	905
Interned	44	227	271
Missing	15	32	271
Total casualties	3496	36,424	40,165

*Source:* PRO, ADM 1/8592/131B, Return on Manning during the War, September 1919.

Among those killed were three flag officers, nineteen captains, forty-one commanders and 310 lieutenants.<sup>41</sup>

What was disconcerting, however, were the meaningless casualties suffered as a result of a carelessness that appalled the general public and utterly frustrated officers humiliated by the perceived incompetence of others. The continuous loss of highly trained and skilled officers and ratings shook the confidence of the corps, especially when there seemed to be no countervailing benefit. In September 1914, three armoured cruisers steaming slowly in the Broad Fourteens in the North Sea were torpedoed within an hour

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<sup>41</sup> PRO, ADM 10/16, List of Obituaries of Naval Officers dying between 1903 and 1933.

by a solitary German submarine killing nearly a thousand men. Included in the crew were a large number of midshipmen who had been mobilized from Dartmouth and sent to sea. On New Years' Day 1915, the battleship *Formidable* was torpedoed steaming at less than ten knots while steering on a steady course with the loss of hundreds of lives. Not even the most basic anti-submarine measures were undertaken. By mid-November of 1914 the Navy (including Marines and reserves) had already lost over 4000 men (excluding officers) on active service.<sup>42</sup> Admiral Lord Charles Beresford was dismayed, as he wrote to Admiral W.H. Henderson, "I quite agree with you; the Navy will lose confidence in its leaders if Officers and men are murdered with no particular object whatever... I would send a whole squadron of battleships to certain death to win an action by another attack, but would not risk the life of one man without there being an object to attain."<sup>43</sup> Richmond wrote in response to the loss of *Formidable* "[i]t looks like some lunacy of Bayly's. So I should expect it to be. The man has no judgement, is as obstinate as a mule, and is too stupid to convince."<sup>44</sup>

The Battle of Coronel, where Cradock's squadron was destroyed, was also a profound shock. After the action Midshipman Harold Hickling in *Glasgow* recalled:

I prefer not to dwell on the next 48 hours. Never have I known the Captain, officers and men of a ship so closely knit, bound closely together in the misery of our common tragedy. The Royal Navy of

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<sup>42</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8403/429, Report on Number of Royal Naval and Royal Marine Personnel killed up to 17 November 1914; a further 3500 would be added at Coronel alone later that same month.

<sup>43</sup> NMM, W.H. Henderson Papers (HEN) 2/2, Beresford to Henderson, 18 January 1915.

<sup>44</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 134; diary entry 4 January 1915. Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, a former commandant of the Portsmouth War College, was Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet and was the flag officer present on 1 January 1915. It is interesting to note that General Charles Gordon was Bayly's maternal grandfather; "Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly," *Dictionary of National Biography 1931-1940*, 54.



which we were so proud defeated in the first major engagement of the war by the Imperial Navy of upstart Germany; not just defeated but almost annihilated, and in a few minutes, without as far as could be seen inflicting any damage whatsoever on the enemy. Individually and collectively we were humiliated to the very depths of our beings.<sup>45</sup>

Even Doveton Sturdee's revenge off the Falklands in December had a dark side, as Richmond wrote: "I confess it makes me sick that this consequential blunderer [Sturdee] should get the credit, when the keels of 5 good ships and some 3500 men lie to his account."<sup>46</sup>

One of the available mechanisms that existed as a safety valve and a source of new professional ideas was *The Naval Review*. While *The Review* was originally intended to serve as an educational tool for junior officers, it began after the outbreak of war to provide a venue to digest the war experience. In the words of Herbert Richmond, *The Review* could evaluate the war experience even at the cost of "undeserved reputations."<sup>47</sup> But it was not long before the journal ran afoul of the Admiralty for allegedly disclosing confidential information relating to the Falkland Islands operations against von Spee.<sup>48</sup>

In May 1915 Admiral Henderson had an interview with the Admiralty Secretary, Sir William Graham Greene, during which the latter displayed a telegram from Jellicoe complaining that *The Review* had revealed information of use to the enemy, including details of Admiralty orders, bases and concerns over civilians having access to the

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<sup>45</sup> Hickling, *Sailor at Sea*, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 131; diary entry, 13 December 1914. Sturdee had been serving as Chief of Staff at the Admiralty when strategic dispositions had placed Cradock in a very difficult position.

<sup>47</sup> NMM, RIC 7/1, H.W. Richmond to W.H. Henderson, 11 February 1919.

<sup>48</sup> Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth (RNM), Naval Review Papers (NRP), Graham Greene to Henderson, 14 May 1915.

information.<sup>49</sup> Henderson mounted a spirited defence, informing the Secretary “the objections made by Sir J. Jellicoe were frivolous. I could only infer that there was some other cause for his doing it.” To be fair to Jellicoe, he was under considerable strain as Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet and had been extraordinarily upset (as had been Beatty and his staff) about the detachment of three battlecruisers to hunt down von Spee in the South Atlantic. Any move to divulge British operations outside the North Sea might prejudice his own fleet operations. When this was debated within the Admiralty, Oswyn Murray concluded that “[i]f the Chief Censor [Rear Admiral Douglas Brownrigg] is right in describing the articles as a ‘mass of valuable secret information,’ it is quite clear that NO precautions ought to be regarded as adequate: the magazine ought to be suppressed at once.”<sup>50</sup> Murray, however, could not fathom what information could be of possible use to the enemy.<sup>51</sup>

Henderson carried the issue even further in July but still could not understand Jellicoe’s objections.

There might well be 2 or 3 paragraphs that some particular officer would disapprove of, just as there are liable to be paragraphs daily in the Press that certain individuals would dislike, but as long as they are facts and are part of the history of the operations of the war, and fair comment for a useful purpose there can be no possible utility in trying to suppress them. I am sure you will agree with me that silence, suppression of facts, or legitimate descriptions are harmful to the Service and merely defeat the ends of those who try to enforce it.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> RNM, NRP, Notes on an Interview with Sir W. Graham Greene, 27 May 1915.

<sup>50</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8423/157, Censorship of *The Naval Review*, 1915, minute by Oswyn Murray, 22 June 1915.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> RNM, NRP, Henderson to Graham Greene, 22 July 1915.

Jellicoe also complained to the Admiralty about the publication of confidential material in *The Naval Review* about Coronel. As Richmond testily noted in his diary:

A telegram came in this morning from Jellicoe saying that the May number of *The Naval Review* contained a lot information which would be useful to the enemy. He referred particularly to accounts of the movements of ships in the beginning of the war and to papers giving hints of experience in the Falkland Islands Battle. This is extraordinarily childish.<sup>53</sup>

The French apparently published the opening movements of their armies at the beginning of the war. Captain Herbert Richmond argued, “but our Admirals, jealous as usual of our officers knowing anything, believe that the proceedings of a few cruisers 6 months ago are of such importance that they cannot be divulged. It is puerile.” Jellicoe advocated having *The Review* either censored or closed down entirely for the duration of the war.<sup>54</sup>

Dewar wrote to Henderson:

I think it most unnecessary and unjust. There is not a word in the pages mentioned which could be of the slightest assistance to the enemy. Once censorship begins you do not know where it will end. The Admiralty will probably endeavour to carry it on in peacetime and the utility of *The Naval Review* will disappear. Thousands of men have been killed and the war prolonged owing to our faulty system of Admiralty administration & the lack of any war training for officers. Only publicity and criticism will alter that after the war.<sup>55</sup>

Henderson in turn wrote to the Admiralty, attacking Jellicoe’s argument that *The Review* could not be trusted to maintain secrecy because the Society had civilians among it

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<sup>53</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 157; diary entry, 12 May 1915.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> RNM, NRP, K.G.B. Dewar to Henderson, 8 June 1915.

members. He provided a list of the non-naval members, including A.J. Balfour, Austen Chamberlain, Julian Corbett, Graham Greene, Sir Edward Grey, Lord Haldane, Lord Selborne and Lord Sydenham, all of whom had access to all sorts of Government secrets.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless in October, *The Review* was formerly suspended by the Admiralty.<sup>57</sup>

Henderson continued to collect material for the *Review* because the intention was to resume publication after the conclusion of the war. His London house became a clearing-house and a sort of a precursor to the modern think-tank as he acted as a crucial link between younger officers, the press and the politicians.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the most traumatic event for the executive branch was the Battle of Jutland. On 31 May 1916, the long-awaited clash between the Grand and High Seas Fleets took place. Although twice outmanoeuvred by Jellicoe's battle squadrons, Scheer was able to escape. To make matters worse, severe losses were inflicted on Beatty's battle cruisers, and magazine explosions destroyed three. This was intensely frustrating to officers, as Lieutenant Stephen King-Hall related after the war: "I felt I wanted to burst into tears, hit somebody, or do something equally foolish."<sup>59</sup> The sense of frustration at failing to bring the High Seas Fleet to decisive action seemed to call into question the strategic and tactical doctrine of the Grand Fleet and raised questions about the capacity of the sea-going fleet.

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<sup>56</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8423/157, Henderson to Admiralty, 4 June 1915.

<sup>57</sup> RNM, NRP, Graham Greene to Henderson, 13 August 1915

<sup>58</sup> Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar*, 56-57.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen King-Hall, *North Sea Diary, 1914-1918* (London: Newnes, 1919), 160.

It must be recalled that many officers were killed in the battle, including some who were very junior. According to information released by the Admiralty at the time, over 150 executive branch officers were killed.<sup>60</sup> Among those killed were the two flag officers, Arbuthnot and Hood, but also several captains and many midshipmen and lieutenants. A number of those killed were also the sons of naval officers with the influence to have their sons attached to the Battle Cruiser Fleet, including Midshipman Malcolm Harris, the youngest son of Admiral Sir Robert Harris; Lieutenant Commander David Douglas, the son of Admiral Sir Archibald Douglas; and Midshipman John Scott, the eldest son of Admiral Sir Percy Scott.<sup>61</sup>

This situation was further magnified by the Admiralty's maladroit handling of Jellicoe's despatch, which the press took to indicate that the Grand Fleet had suffered a defeat. If the best commanders in the Navy could not perform up to expectations, something was seriously wrong with the system. Moreover, a visible split opened between the officers and men of the Battle Cruiser and Battle fleets. Lord Louis Mountbatten, then a midshipman in H.M.S. *Lion*, remembered many years later the prevalent feeling of superiority of the battle cruiser personnel. "This came, I gathered, from having a small, brainy but over-cautious man like Jellicoe as the Commander-in-Chief; obviously he was not a real fighting leader like our beloved Beatty."<sup>62</sup> Hence, there was a developing weakness in the faith in Jellicoe's leadership. Moreover, his tendency to

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<sup>60</sup> "Casualties at Jutland," *The Times*, 5 June 1916.

<sup>61</sup> "Officer Losses," *The Times*, 5 June 1916.

<sup>62</sup> Louis Mountbatten, "The Battle of Jutland," *Mariner's Mirror*, LXVI, No. 2 (1980), 101.

centralize tactical control in his own hands became crucial after December 1916 when he became First Sea Lord after Henry Jackson.

All the disagreements, unnecessary losses and professional in fighting between the autumn of 1914 and the end of 1916 could be contained. Indeed, in many ways these disputes were no more serious than those in the old wars. In the age of sail powerful disagreements had wracked the Navy.<sup>63</sup> Even Jutland, as bitterly disappointing as it was, did not fracture the service until after the Board of Admiralty and the professional officers lost confidence in the wake of the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and the Admiralty's inability to address heavy losses to British shipping.

At the same time that the Allied cause was wavering, with Russia wracked by internal revolt and the French army being bled white, the sure shield of the British empire, the Navy, had confessed its professional failure. This was the heart of the matter. Despite the fight with other professions and the insecurity of the officer corps, their core competence of exercising command at sea had remained. Yet with the advent of an entirely new type of naval war the corps was unable to cope with the changed circumstances. Despite the best efforts of Jellicoe and some of the officers he brought with him when he became First Sea Lord, no appreciable dent had been made in shipping losses. Indeed, the measures Jellicoe attempted to put in place, such as a specialized anti-submarine division of the naval staff, failed to stop the losses. Only one mechanism was resisted as defensive: the convoy. While the staff division under Rear Admiral Alexander Duff was working to further technological advances to defeat the U-Boat menace, there

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<sup>63</sup> For example, the case of the dispute between Admirals Lestock and Matthews in the aftermath of the Battle of Malaga in 1744. See John Creswell, *British Admirals in the Eighteenth Century: Tactics in Battle* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 62-80.

seemed to be no connection to the core of the problem. It was only quite by accident that one of Duff's assistants, Commander Reginald Henderson, uncovered the problem's true nature.<sup>64</sup>

That the primary difficulty the Admiralty faced *operationally* in the year 1917 was the unrestricted submarine campaign against British and neutral shipping is uncontested. The submarine provided a threat that had not been anticipated, and the Admiralty found itself at a loss to deal with its implications. The arming of merchantmen and the independent routing of vessels seemed reasonable propositions if submarines operated by prize rules that compelled them to surface and give warning prior to sinking a vessel. However, the rules had changed at the end of 1916 when the German high command calculated that by pursuing an unrestricted campaign it could knock Britain out of the war before the United States could effectively intervene. In the process, one of the Admiralty's key assumptions was rendered irrelevant.

In the first three months of the unrestricted campaign U-Boats sunk nearly four million tons of British shipping, while British yards produced a mere half million tons in the same period.<sup>65</sup> The shipping situation was so grave that the Government was forced to buy up shipping all over the world, institute rationing, adjust labour policy and re-examine overseas commitments to save tonnage. If losses had continued it was doubtful that Britain could have remained in the war.

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<sup>64</sup> Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, IV, 150-151; Paul Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (London: University College London Press, 1994), 355.

<sup>65</sup> Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, IV, 65 and 103.

Even more frightening than the loss of valuable shipping was the Admiralty reaction to it. Even before Jellicoe was appointed First Sea Lord, a November 1916 report argued that the only solution to the submarine menace was “palliation.”<sup>66</sup> Despite Jellicoe’s efforts to re-organize the naval staff, very little of a positive nature occurred. Indeed, in April 1917 Britain lost almost 900,000 tons of shipping in a single month. Jellicoe’s reaction was brutally frank:

The real fact of the matter is this. We are carrying on this war... as if we had the absolute command of the sea. We have not – and have not had for many months... It is quite true, of course, that we are absolute masters of the situation as far as surface ships are concerned, but it must be realised ... that all this is quite useless if the enemy’s submarines paralyse, as they do now, our lines of communications. History has shown time after time the fatal results of basing naval or military strategy on an insecure line of communications. Disaster is certain to follow, *and our present policy is heading straight for disaster* and it is useless and dangerous in the highest degree to ignore the fact.<sup>67</sup>

Jellicoe went on to press for limitations on Britain’s overseas commitments to ensure that there was enough tonnage to continue the essential campaign in Flanders and to transport supplies to France and Italy. Jellicoe’s policies could not have come at a worse time, since Prime Minister Lloyd-George was engaged in a running battle with the General Staff and the Commander in Chief of the B.E.F. over the direction of the war.<sup>68</sup>

When Jellicoe’s pessimism turned to despondency he began to appear to be an obstructionist. As he buried himself further into routine work and fretted over the

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<sup>66</sup> Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, II, 144-149.

<sup>67</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8480; see also Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, II, 261, April 1917, original emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, IV, 202-206; and John Terraine, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* (London: Leo Cooper, 1990), 319-325.



direction of the naval war, the First Sea Lord became increasingly impatient with the politicians' constant suggestions for offensive measures. He had even less patience with the efforts of junior officers to put forward ideas, as he wrote in response to what he called the "six-monthly" agitation. "In these circumstances it would be quite useless for a comparatively junior officer without a knowledge of available vessels to put forward proposals for an offensive. It would merely waste the time of the more senior members of the War Staff in examining these proposals."<sup>69</sup> Interference by politicians, especially Lloyd George and Eric Geddes, was also anathema to Jellicoe. The problem was that Jellicoe lacked the stature and personality to assert his views. Moreover, his legitimacy was challenged from both within and without the service.

Vice-Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, the Deputy First Sea Lord whom Geddes had appointed to relieve Jellicoe of some of his vast responsibilities, found his position impossible. In fact, he was given no work to do. Wemyss cornered the First Sea Lord on this issue in early December 1917 and demanded to know whether Jellicoe trusted him. Jellicoe responded that he had complete confidence in his subordinate "... but he could see no way towards shifting any of his responsibilities on to me, since such would not be legal. My reply was that it was, legally a matter for the First Lord, and that if he chose to appoint certain duties to me, the procedure would be constitutionally correct. Sir John did not agree."<sup>70</sup> Jellicoe exemplified the awful majesty of the post he held and failed to realize that in modern total war, complete responsibility could not devolve onto a single

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<sup>69</sup> Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, II, 168, Jellicoe to Sir Edward Carson, 7 June 1917.

<sup>70</sup> Victoria Wemyss, *The Life and Letters of Lord Wester Wemyss* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1935), 364. This quotation is an excerpt from Wemyss's unfinished memoirs.

man. The truth was that Jellicoe nearly broke himself attempting to uphold the War Lord position that Fisher had previously arrogated onto himself. He was also apparently suffering from a couple of chronic medical conditions that may have affected his judgement. In January 1918, Fisher, now head of the Board of Inventions, ordered the best physicians available to treat Jellicoe.<sup>71</sup> It did not matter whether Jellicoe's critics at the Admiralty had a point; the point was that he had become the problem.<sup>72</sup>

The heavy losses and self-confessed inability of the Admiralty to cope with this new type of warfare deprived the professional leadership in the service of their legitimacy in the eyes of the War Cabinet, the general public and, most important, the officer corps itself. Some began to wonder openly whether the army could win the war before the navy lost it. As losses mounted and the navy's response continued to be inadequate the service lost stature. At the end of April 1917, Lloyd George personally visited the Admiralty to discover what methods the Naval Staff intended to implement to staunch the losses. The Prime Minister was convinced that Jellicoe was spending too much time on day-to-day issues and routine work.

I consider it of the utmost importance that the First Sea Lord should be relieved of as much detail as possible, and Admiral Sir John Jellicoe quite agreed in this view, and stated that he had been endeavouring to obtain this relief ever since he took over his present post. One obstacle to this, which Sir John Jellicoe mentioned, was that unless he exercises his personal initiative and drive he could not obtain the material he required sufficiently quickly. This is obviously wrong, and it is of the utmost importance that the Admiralty should be so organised that the

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<sup>71</sup> CCAC, CHAR 2/92, Fisher to Winston Churchill, 30 January 1918.

<sup>72</sup> Donald Schurman, "Admiral Sir John Jellicoe," in Malcolm Murfett (ed.) *The First Sea Lords: From Fisher to Mountbatten* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1995), 109.

First Sea Lord is entirely free from the necessity of devoting his attention to the supply of *matériel*.<sup>73</sup>

The level of interference, opposition and political pressure on the Admiralty led Sir Edward Carson, the First Lord, to write Jellicoe an extensive memorandum urging the establishment of a separate planning division within the Naval Staff.

I have observed that a good deal of criticism has lately been levelled against the Admiralty on the ground that no offensive operations with a specific objective are from time to time undertaken; and in conversation with the Prime Minister and other members of the War Cabinet, it is clear to my mind that this criticism has given rise to a good deal of dissatisfaction in many quarters with the present administration of the Admiralty.<sup>74</sup>

Carson went on to contend that it was irrelevant whether this criticism was justified; the fact that it had currency meant that the Admiralty had to take steps to ensure that the Navy was seen to be doing something. Carson argued for the creation of a special offensive measures section under the direction of the Director of Operations to be solely responsible for operational plans and to free Jellicoe of some administrative duties. This section was to be headed by two or three captains and a commander who would have access to all information. The plans conceived by this section were to be examined by the Chief of the Naval Staff in the presence of the First Lord.<sup>75</sup>

Jellicoe was less than impressed with the agitation for offensive operations.

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<sup>73</sup> PRO, Cabinet Papers (CAB) 63/20, Note by the Prime Minister of his Conference at the Admiralty, 30 April 1917.

<sup>74</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8489/118, Carson to Jellicoe, 7 June 1917; and Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, II, 166-167.

<sup>75</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8489/118, Memorandum by Carson, Planning Section of the Naval Staff, 7 June 1917; see also Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, II, 166-167.

I have been informed that the Prime Minister sent for Captain Richmond (I assume in connection with this proposition), and it is probable that this was done at the instigation of Colonel Hankey. I do not make any comment on this interference with Admiralty administration by Colonel Hankey if I am correct in my assumption, but, if Captain Richmond is likely to be suitable in other respects, I think that he would probably be useful at the Admiralty, and therefore suggest his appointment as a preliminary step.<sup>76</sup>

Jellicoe was particularly irked by the misperception that it was strictly the responsibility of senior members of the War Staff to initiate offensive operations. Furthermore, with resources stretched to the limit, it was impossible to believe that the appointment of more officers was a panacea. "In these circumstances it would be quite useless for a comparatively junior officer without a knowledge of available vessels to put forward proposals for an offensive. It would merely waste the time of the more senior officers of the War Staff in examining these proposals."<sup>77</sup>

Considerable resentment was expressed toward Geddes when he came to the Admiralty, first as Controller and then as First Lord. Part of this was because although he was not a professional officer, he was made a vice admiral by a special Order-in-Council.<sup>78</sup> Even after Lloyd George left the Admiralty to its own devices, the admirals were not convinced of the need to follow through on the items discussed. "[E]ven then the

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<sup>76</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8489/118, Jellicoe to Carson, 9 June 1917.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> PRO, ADM 1/8489/122, Order-in-Council, 13 June 1917. Geddes was especially unpopular after the dismissal of Jellicoe in December 1917; BL, Jellicoe Papers, Add. MSS. 49036 vol. XLVIII, Cecil Burney to Jellicoe, 30 December 1917; where Burney describes Geddes as "that railway porter."

Board were like the son in the Scriptures who was told to go and work in the Vineyard and replied, 'I go,' but went not."<sup>79</sup>

Facing pressure from within the state machinery, Jellicoe also identified the press as an opponent of the Admiralty. He believed that there were several ways in which newspapermen attacked his position. The first was political, as they twitted Carson, and by extension Jellicoe, over Ireland. The second was in the form of Arthur Pollen in *Land and Water*, who criticized the Admiralty for not accepting his fire control system. Indeed, Jellicoe refused Pollen permission to distribute pamphlets in the fleet regarding gunnery practices: "... my reason being that I knew that it would give rise in the minds of young and inexperienced gunnery Lieutenants to feelings of unrest with the present methods, which produced, with the assistance of Dreyer – whilst I was in the Grand Fleet most astonishing results." The third centre of dissent had to do with Custance, who in Jellicoe's view should have "collapsed years ago – in view of the disproof of all his pet theories."<sup>80</sup> Along with questioning the professional competence of the Board came concentrated attacks from papers such as *The Daily Mail*, which were aided by a group of mid-grade officers under the loose leadership of Richmond who were determined that the structure of the Admiralty had to be overhauled dramatically. It would do no good merely to give the old people new titles; instead, a clean sweep was necessary.

What was new about this challenge was not only the close connection between these officers and the political press but also the officers' indifference to and even support

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<sup>79</sup> CCAC, S.W. Roskill Papers (ROSK) 3/22, N. Leslie to Lord Maclay, 14 February 1933.

<sup>80</sup> CCAC, WMYS 4/4, Jellicoe to Wemyss, 12 May 1917.

of concentrated editorial attacks against their superiors on the Board of Admiralty. Indeed, Commander Plunkett, perhaps the most politically astute of these officers, concluded, “on the whole they appear to have drawn upon their heads that type of criticism which they have justly merited.”<sup>81</sup> Journalistic attacks were also welcomed by these “Young Turks” because they raised the possibility that they as a “despised and rejected minority” could save the nation, even to the point where some officers were prepared to fall on their swords.<sup>82</sup> Further, the press campaigns were regarded as necessary not only to preserve the strength and prestige of the Navy but also to save the country from disaster. Indeed, Captain Drax argued that *The Daily Mail* had performed a national service in its “publish the tonnage” campaign in the summer of 1917. Still, a twinge of regret remained when Drax observed “[i]t is a pathetic thing to descend to the lowest forms of journalism in our efforts to save the Country from disaster. There seems to be no alternative.”<sup>83</sup>

The criticism of Jellicoe was also intensely personal. Arthur Pollen to some degree blamed Jellicoe (who was at the time Director of Naval Ordnance) for the Navy’s failure to adopt his fire control system and was dismayed by the results at Jutland.<sup>84</sup> It was an open secret that the suppression of *The Naval Review* was done at the instigation of Jellicoe while he was at the Grand Fleet, a move that profoundly irritated Admiral

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<sup>81</sup> CCAC, R. Drax Papers (DRAX) 1/16, Drax to Peter [illegible], 1 May 1917.

<sup>82</sup> CCAC, DRAX 1/16, Drax to Horace Plunkett, June 1917.

<sup>83</sup> NMM, DEW 2/, Drax to Henderson, 29 August 1917.

<sup>84</sup> See Jon Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology, and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

Henderson and his friends. One such ally, Lord Northcliffe had made a nuisance of himself at the Admiralty in the spring of 1917 when German aircraft dropped bombs near the press baron's home on the Isle of Thanet. On a visit to the Admiralty, Northcliffe complained of the inadequacy of air defences, a charge to which Jellicoe objected, stating that the defences were the best they could be. In response, Northcliffe wrote to Sir Edward Carson "I know that Sir John Jellicoe is wrong. I hope that he is not misleading you on other matters."<sup>85</sup> Carson, of course, was irritated with the aspersions cast on Jellicoe's character. Although Admiralty censors had quashed stories in the *Daily Mail*, attacks on Jellicoe in October of 1917 reached the point where he sought the advice of the Attorney General, F.E. Smith, as to whether legal action could be taken against the newspaper.<sup>86</sup>

Things were not made any easier within the officer corps, either. First, old man Fisher was still casting covetous eyes at the Admiralty and subjecting everyone to his biting observations from his lofty perch at the Board of Invention and Research.<sup>87</sup> On at least one occasion, Fisher had attempted to get Reginald Hall fired as Director of Naval Intelligence because of a perceived personal slight.<sup>88</sup> Of course, this may have been aggravated by Hall's role in Fisher's ouster in May 1915. By early 1917, Fisher had

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<sup>85</sup> J. Lee Thompson, *Politicians, Lord Northcliffe, & the Press, & the Great War, 1914-1919* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999), 136.

<sup>86</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1805, Geddes to F.E. Smith, 27 October 1917.

<sup>87</sup> CCAC, M.P.A. Hankey Papers (HNKY) 4/10, Memorandum by J.A. Fisher "The VI Big Balfourian Blunders or Admiralty Apathy for 18 Months," 1916.

<sup>88</sup> William James, *The Eyes of the Navy: A Biographical Study of Admiral Sir Reginald Hall* (London: Methuen, 1955), 82-89.

grown much more virulent in his correspondence and once even refused to discuss his master plan for dealing with submarine losses until he had been restored at the head of the Admiralty.<sup>89</sup> When Jellicoe wisely dissented at the possibility of working with Fisher, his old mentor was furious, writing to Carson that

I can take no part in anything that subverts Jellicoe, but I told him to his face yesterday that, had I known 13 years ago that he would have sold me by giving up the Grand Fleet, I never would have had anything to do with him.... Although I've not forgiven him (and never will, as I told him yesterday) yet I've sent him a Plan for dealing effectively with the German Submarine Menace. If he don't like it, there's an end to it...."<sup>90</sup>

Despite Fisher's attempts at resurrection and periodic agitation in Parliament and the press, he was not a serious threat. Moreover, Fisher had no legitimacy within the officer corps, especially after his infamous conduct in May 1915 when he had effectively deserted his post and given Asquith an ultimatum.<sup>91</sup>

Yet it was an entirely different matter with a group of comparatively junior officers who had considerable support within the leading elements of the service afloat, including from Beatty, who had succeeded Jellicoe at the Grand Fleet. They were untainted by anything to do with Fisher and had more to offer than the mere assertions that sprinkled much of his communications. They offered concrete plans and ideas to get the Admiralty out of the professional quagmire in which it had become entrapped.

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<sup>89</sup> PRO, CAB 21/7, Memorandum on Submarines by Fisher, 31 March 1917.

<sup>90</sup> PRO, CAB 21/7, Fisher to Carson, 1 February 1917.

<sup>91</sup> When the conflict between Churchill and Fisher came to a head in May 1915, Fisher informed Asquith in a stiffly written letter that he would stay only as long as he was given a similar role as that accorded to Kitchener at the War Office. Without bothering to get a response, Fisher packed himself off to Scotland and was immediately ordered to return to London. See Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, II, 279-286



Inside the Service there was a group of officers who were aggrieved with Jellicoe because of the failure at Jutland, his decision to suspend *The Naval Review* and his systematic failure to come to grips with the submarine menace. But the personal element was comparatively minor. These officers did not attack Jellicoe because they disliked him but because they were convinced that doing so was the only way the naval staff could be made effective. To break the rules of discipline was a last resort that was conceived as a desperate move to save the situation.

These officers had been critical of the Admiralty administration and harboured dreams of seeing themselves in positions of authority. Indeed, they adopted an almost messianic role. As one of them wrote in 1917, “[w]e must turn at last to that despised and rejected minority who have studied war seriously before war began and *really* know how it ought to be run.” Only they could offer systematic solutions to the Navy’s problems as Drax wrote to a friend:

I have long hoped, and I believed it to be right and proper, that we should continue to muddle through on amateurish lines, paying a colossal price, incurring colossal losses but winning through in the end by virtue of those many and very fine British qualities which even the stupidest... possess in full measure. I still hope it may be so.<sup>92</sup>

One of these officers was Captain Reginald Drax, who had been Beatty’s flag commander and who after his promotion to post rank commanded the cruiser *Blanche* that was attached to the Grand Fleet. Drax had extensive political contacts through his uncle, the M.P. Horace Plunkett, and Arthur Pollen. In a memorandum he asked his uncle to pass along to the First Lord (which was forwarded to Maurice Hankey in the CID

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<sup>92</sup> CCAC, DRAX 1/16, Drax to Peter ?, Enclosure “The Admiralty”, 1 May 1917, original emphasis.

Secretariat), he laid out the case for the officers' interference in the professional leadership of the Board. Citing necessity as a rationale, "[t]hese younger officers had been utterly impotent, for the sole reason that their seniority was not sufficient to carry adequate weight."<sup>93</sup> Plunkett, however, did not take his nephew's claims at face value, and after bouncing the ideas off Hankey, challenged his arguments. Both Beatty and Jellicoe, he asserted, had been promoted without reference to seniority, and RN officers were superior in performance to either their Italian or French counterparts. He also noted that Jellicoe invited ideas from both Beatty and Tyrwhitt.

Drax responded to his Uncle's prodding:

Let me confine it to one man J-----. He enjoys the applause and confidence of King & Country. What can I or what will history say against him?" This: defence of Scapa, evacuation of the North Sea, loss of Audacious, holding the Battle Cruiser Fleet in port, failure to support the BCF at Hartlepool, Jutland... He is an ultra-materialist and is obsessive and overwhelmed with detail.<sup>94</sup>

In other words, Drax wanted to place the strategic command on a professional footing and to reassert the authority of the executive branch by placing command on a scientific basis.

These officers were not foolish enough to stick their necks out to push for a revolution without establishing close contacts with the levers of power inside and outside the service. Within the service this group of intellectual officers had at least the tacit support of David Beatty, Reginald Tyrwhitt and Roger Keyes. Beatty, as Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, held the most prestigious and important sea command. Two of the most important members of the Young Turks, Richmond and Drax, were captains in

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<sup>93</sup> CCAC, DRAX 1/16, Drax to Horace Plunkett, 20 June 1917.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

the Grand Fleet, and the latter was a former flag commander in Beatty's battle cruiser days. Another of these intellectuals, Roger Bellairs, was a staff officer. Despite Beatty's encouragement to Jellicoe in dealing with the politicians, there is strong evidence that he remained in close contact and sympathized with their efforts. It is rather difficult to believe that one of his captains would be discussing Admiralty administration with the Prime Minister without his being aware of the substance of the discussions. Indeed, Richmond reported to Beatty the substance of his conversation with both the Prime Minister and the First Lord when he returned to the Grand Fleet in June.<sup>95</sup> For instance, in March 1918, after the palace revolution, Drax asked Beatty to use his influence to have Richmond appointed Director of Training and Staff Duties. "To make certain of victory now we must eliminate the errors of the past and arrange, at the eleventh hour, to commit blunders no more. How is this to be done? Here also, I come to 'King Charles' head"; so let me apologise & stop."<sup>96</sup> Beatty also frequently made use of advice tendered by Richmond while he was in the Grand Fleet and discussed at length the defects in Admiralty organization. Further correspondence survives between Drax and Beatty's Secretary, Frank Spikernell. In addition, Beatty's wife was in contact with Arthur Pollen and fed information to him throughout 1917.<sup>97</sup> As for Roger Keyes and Reginald Tyrwhitt, they were dissatisfied with Admiralty policy and had led an agitation to have Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon removed from his post at Dover.

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<sup>95</sup> Marder (ed.), *Portrait of an Admiral*, 261-262.

<sup>96</sup> CCAC, DRAX 1/20, Drax to Beatty, 1918.

<sup>97</sup> Ranft (ed.), *Beatty Papers*, I, 422, Ethel Beatty to David Beatty, 7 May 1917. Beatty's wife was the intermediary between himself and Pollen.

Furthermore, there was energetic use of contacts outside the service. Lieutenant J.M. Kenworthy had contacts with Lord Northcliffe, and it was through the agency of the latter that he gained an interview with Lloyd George on the state of the naval situation.<sup>98</sup> Also, Admiral Henderson had contacts with Lord Milner, a member of the War Cabinet.

For these officers, however, press agitation was but a means to an end. Arguing that no great reforms were ever made without some form of public outcry, they tried to force those in power to respond to their critiques. Although there was a tendency to blame the politicians, they had only “stepped in to fill the mental vacuum which existed at the Admiralty.”<sup>99</sup>

A combination of backroom manoeuvring and the ruthless use of press contacts enabled these young officers and their allies to arrange interviews with the War Cabinet and the Prime Minister himself. Carson was dismissed as being a captive of his immediate professional advisers.<sup>100</sup> The situation was especially grave in the spring of 1917, when Henderson started writing letters to members of the War Cabinet, including the Prime Minister and Lord Milner. The ploy worked, and Henderson managed to obtain an appointment with Milner and by the first week in June had set up an interview between the Prime Minister and Richmond. The result of the latter was that Dewar was assigned by the Prime Minister to write weekly summaries for the War Cabinet. This understandably engendered deep resentment among the Sea Lords; when an opening

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<sup>98</sup> J.M. Kenworthy, *Sailors, Statesmen and Others* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1933), 72-81.

<sup>99</sup> NMM, DEW 33/, Dewar to Richmond, 7 May 1916.

<sup>100</sup> NMM, DEW 33/, Dewar to Richmond, 1 July 1917. A judgement confirmed by Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, IV, 54-56.

occurred, orders were cut to send Dewar off to the East Indies as Executive Officer of a cruiser with no engines.<sup>101</sup>

Things got worse for Jellicoe and the Admiralty in general as Henderson continued to hammer at the Navy's leadership in print as well as in private letters to the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet. As the Admiral wrote:

A new and better sort of brains are required if the war is to be brought to a successful conclusion or if we are to avoid disaster. The existing heads are incapable of organizing the Admiralty on lines that can effect this... and are discredited both in strategical, tactical and administrative sense; what is worse, brought up in a school which despises the politician and always tries to hoodwink him, as they have done in the case of the War Cabinet and are therefore unworthy of confidence.<sup>102</sup>

Further, Henderson announced that the Admiralty was unlikely to act on its commitment to look for areas of offensive action. He concluded that there was only one officer who could devise such plans: Richmond.

Later in June, Henderson wrote to Milner that the major flaw in the system was the Admiralty's unwillingness to hold courts martial to clear the air.

The reply is a very simple one, it is because they abrogated under irrelevant excuses the time honoured custom of our forefathers to investigate all losses and failures by a Court Martial sitting in public, which would have elicited the TRUTH, apportioned blame when proved, caused the elimination of the unfit and their gradual supersession by those who were proving themselves capable.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> NMM, DEW 33/, Dewar to Richmond, 12 September 1917; "I have to very careful. I am looked upon as 'an exceedingly dangerous person!!' Be careful not to associate my name with anything."

<sup>102</sup> NMM, HEN 2/5, Henderson to Lloyd George, 23 June 1917.

<sup>103</sup> NMM, HEN 2/5, Henderson to Milner, 29 June 1917.

Three days later, Henderson again wrote to Milner, enclosing a critical article he was proposing to send to *Land and Water*. Milner, careful to reply through the hands of his secretary, refused comment.<sup>104</sup>

In late June, Drax wrote a draft memorandum, which he considered sending to the Prime Minister, outlining the discontent in the Fleet with the Admiralty. Although the document was never sent, it provides insight into the thoughts of those revolutionaries who attempted to change the direction of naval policy in the summer and fall of 1917.

You probably know me well enough to believe that I have no axe to grind and no enmity to gratify. In making to you a detailed statement of the case as it now is I am actuated only by the urgent needs of the State, and for this reason I can keep silent no longer, though the chance of your doing good on this information may be sadly remote. For nearly 3 years now, a number of our younger naval officers who have studied war scientifically in days of peace, have been looking on with horror and amazement at the successive blunders of our Admiralty administration. Needless lives have been sacrificed, millions of pounds have been thrown away, and the fundamental principles of Strategy and Tactics have been violated again and again. These younger officers have been utterly impotent, for the sole reason that their seniority was not sufficient to carry adequate weight. It may perhaps be urged in reply that they are only a clique of cranks whose ideas are no more use than anyone else's; but it can be proved that practically every one of our successive disasters and misfortunes have been foretold by one or more of these officers and in various cases have been put forward officially, either verbally or in writing, only to be contemptuously rejected...<sup>105</sup>

Drax identified three key problems that led to the situation the Navy faced. First, in the century after 1815 a faulty system of education, which he claimed crushed

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<sup>104</sup> NMM, HEN 2/5, Henderson to Milner, 1 July 1917; and H.C. Thornton to Henderson, 2 July 1917.

<sup>105</sup> CCAC, DRAX 1/16, Unsent Memorandum, 20 June 1917.

individual initiative and imagination, was permitted to become entrenched. He further claimed that there had been no proper study of the art of war among flag officers.

In fact the intellectual development of our Admirals at the present day is remarkably similar to that of our Generals at the time of the South African war, and for precisely the same reasons. There are of course brilliant exceptions like our CinC and Commodore Tyrwhitt, but these are isolated cases based on learning quickly from the teaching of war or on having evaded some part of that deadening peace routine which crushed out the brains of the majority.<sup>106</sup>

While he wisely was chary of providing specific examples of dunderheads and Captain Blimps, he left it to his reader to fill in the gaps. Indeed, Drax blamed no particular individual for the system because “[t]hey are merely the victims of a vicious system and that deplorable defect in the English temperament, hereditary lack of imagination.” The younger officers brought to the Admiralty during the war had become co-opted by the system; as an antidote, Drax urged the immediate replacement of many of the “naval rulers.” But it was difficult to finding replacements who would possess the confidence of the fleet were few in number. Drax nominated Wemyss to replace Jellicoe and recommended the establishment of a small committee centred around Richmond and Dewar to oversee the reconstruction of the Admiralty machinery.<sup>107</sup>

The loss of confidence in the legitimacy of the Jellicoe regime resulted in a letter by Geddes to the First Sea Lord on Christmas Eve 1917:

After very careful consideration I have come to the conclusion that a change is desirable in the post of First Sea Lord. I have not, I can assure you, arrived at this view hastily or without great personal regret and reluctance. I have consulted the Prime Minister and with his

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

concurrence I am asking to see the King to make this recommendation to him. The Prime Minister asks me to tell you that in recognition of your past very distinguished services he proposes to recommend to His Majesty that a peerage should be bestowed upon you. I have thought that you would prefer me to convey this decision to you in writing but, should you wish to see me, I shall of course be at your disposal at any time. My regret at having to convey this decision to you is the greater in view of the very cordial personnel relations which have existed between us throughout.<sup>108</sup>

The immediate result was that Wemyss replaced Jellicoe as First Sea Lord. A temporary crisis among the remaining Sea Lords was averted, and they were persuaded to stay on. Jellicoe went on half pay and was not employed again.

## **Conclusion**

The experience of the Great War was profoundly traumatic for the RN's executive officer corps. Before 1914, forces associated with the ongoing revolution in naval affairs had exerted considerable pressure on naval officers. Despite these forces that altered and indeed, even challenged, the status of executive officers, self-confident assertions about the corps' fitness to command remained untested. That changed with the outbreak of war in 1914. Professional officers were faced with a conflict dramatically different from what had been expected. The war presented innumerable tasks that did not involve exercising command from the bridge of a man-of-war. For these demands, officers were not well prepared. The result was intense frustration, and the claims made by officers were

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<sup>108</sup> PRO, ADM 116/1807, Sir Eric Geddes to Jellicoe, 24 December 1917. See also Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, II, 246.



exposed to searching criticism not merely from outside the profession but also from within.

The incapacity of the Admiralty machinery and the senior executive officers to deal with the reality of industrialized warfare caused a crisis of confidence that was not confined to Parliament or public opinion but also extended into the corps itself. To preserve the integrity of the officer corps and its professional status, this group of comparatively junior officers, with the backing of the fleet commanders, thought it imperative that they intervene to save the situation. Since mechanisms to correct errors and officers who were unfit for their posts did not exist, the Admiralty leadership was systematically by-passed. Suspicions before the war that the senior leadership was not up to scratch were confirmed after 1914.

## Chapter X: Conclusion

I should like to suggest for the possible inspiration of some great painter that on June 4, 1916, practically all the chiefs of the Grand Fleet were together lending themselves to pictorial representation. I refer to the memorial service for the men who lost their lives in the fleet action. Thirty-five men were buried on that occasion. The bleak, windswept hillside, the lines of coffins covered with Union Jacks, the wall of men surrounding the graveyard on the Island of Hoy, the stern, weather-beaten faces of the senior officers still showing the strain of the action, all made a picture which I, for one, will never forget.<sup>1</sup>

But one wonders whether the world is any the better for it. We all live in an appalling age of destruction, and there is no knowing where it will end. Men now strive to destroy whole nations, and it looks as if they will not be satisfied till they can invent some means of blowing up the entire universe.<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation has attempted to deal with pressing personnel issues that were a constant source of difficulty for Admiralty administrators in a period of naval expansion from the 1880s to the end of the First World War. Further, the fact that this expansion was in part due to the development of foreign naval forces and that technological uncertainty was rife meant that the recruiting and training of adequate numbers of officers was a very uncertain enterprise. Changes in technology and organization had very serious ramifications, not merely on Britain's economy, or in the force structure of the Royal Navy, but also at its most fundamental level of the social and intellectual development of the officer corps, men who were expected to wield this instrument of state power. While

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<sup>1</sup> "Naval Portraiture," *The Times*, 20 May 1921; 'Long Hope' was commenting on the famous portrait of all the senior RN officers of the Great War in number 5 uniform in the Admiralty Board Room (which is currently displayed in the National Portrait Gallery at Trafalgar Square, London) and argued that the above portrayal would have been more appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Dundas, *An Admiral's Yarn: Stray Memories of 50 Years* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1922), 21-22.

traditional historiography has tended to divide British officers into reformers and reactionaries, the reality was that a paradigm shift was under way as the corps struggled for its continued pre-eminence and to redefine itself in view of social and technological change.

The trials and tribulations of the so-called “second industrial revolution” at the end of the nineteenth century had a tremendous impact on the British ruling elite. This was particularly so in the case of the leadership of the Royal Navy, which was arguably the first government department in Britain to be forced to confront the dramatic changes in technology and organization. While earlier in the century, and indeed as far back as the eighteenth, the Board of Admiralty (and the Navy Board prior to 1832) managed the largest industrial enterprise in the country, if not the world, the challenge grew more daunting as steam engineering replaced sail. Whereas the officer corps headed and commanded a service that required the co-ordination of various resources, the technical trades of the late Victorian Age required considerable theoretical and mathematical instruction, and many, especially the mechanical trades, made the transformation to professional status. Moreover, the types of materiel and services required by the naval service grew dramatically with the advent of iron and steel hulls, steam power, breech-loading guns, electrical fittings, armour and torpedoes. This required an organization not only to co-ordinate supply, construction and production but also to manage the demands of competing occupational groups, including the executive officer corps. Moreover, it presented the officer corps with the task of commanding these divergent social and professional forces at sea while fighting a constant rearguard action to defend its privileges and status.

At every turn these privileges and the status of the executive branch were challenged by the organizational and technological demands of an industrialized navy. Even the fundamental justification of the status of line officers, traditional seamanship, was permanently altered by the advent of steam and the associated professionals who managed the engineering departments in the sea-going fleet as well in shore establishments. Although steam had been introduced much earlier in the century, it was only by the late 1880s that masts and yards began to disappear permanently from the main fleets, even from detached squadrons. The locomotive power of the fleet was no longer directly controlled by deck officers. As the size and significance of the engineering branch grew, there was a corresponding demand for the improved status of the engine room department and a consequent diminution of the power of executives, particularly junior officers. Although engineers or other officers had no interest in supplanting the executive branch in the overall command of a vessel, they wanted to carve out occupational space not directly responsible to executive officers below the status of the ship's commander. These other professions were invading the occupational and social space of junior officers as wardrooms filled up with highly educated non-executive officers. Moreover, because of the Navy's need to attract these highly skilled and educated professionals, greater prospects of pay and promotion were held out to them. When junior executive officers received no increases and struggled to make do on limited means, with high fees as well as more limited promotion prospects, it was not surprising that considerable resentment was engendered.

Political and social changes at the turn of the century also impacted on the overall influence of the executive officer corps. After the 1870s, the collapse of agricultural

incomes and an increased electorate weakened aristocratic government.<sup>3</sup> Although the officer corps was generally not populated by large numbers of the high nobility, many of the most senior officers who descended from the gentry or poorer nobility were under considerable economic and political pressure. Even though the majority of officers were from the professional middle class, the executive officer corps took on and reflected the values of the aristocracy. The corps was by its very nature a gentleman's occupation with values that were widely regarded as being of the highest order. Values such as honour and gentlemanly bearing were not mere adornments to the officer class but were considered absolute requirements. In the case of the British navy, the executive branch could sometimes act as a social escalator which permitted sons of professionals a chance to reach the upper echelons of society and influence within the existing socio-political arrangements of British society. These officers were therefore not anxious to have the rug pulled from underneath them. The advent of the new "vulgar" plutocracy also was seen as a socio-political threat. Some of this resentment spilled over into an anti-Semitism which was by no means unique to the officer corps.<sup>4</sup>

Even changes that on the surface seemed to enhance the stature of the profession were problematic. In the case of the Royal Navy, the increased size and complexity of the fleet may be counted as a bureaucratic and professional triumph since more ships and more money meant greater resources and opportunities for officers charged with the responsibility of command. However, the dramatic expansion also meant increased

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<sup>3</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 37-53.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill College, Cambridge, Archives Centre (CCAC), W. Wemyss Papers (WMYS) 2/6, Reflections of Trafalgar. See also Barry Domvile, *From Admiral to Cabin Boy* (London: Boswell, 1947), 81.

pressure on the educational infrastructure required to furnish officers who were fit to command complex boxes of machinery. It also placed stress on the numbers of officers required, particularly in the junior ranks, increased the number of highly-skilled and educated lower-deck personnel and led to explosive growth in competing professions, most especially engineers. Moreover, as navalist propaganda gained currency among the electorate, and as more resources were demanded from the state to maintain the naval establishment, the naval service was subjected to greater scrutiny.

The response of the executive was problematic and rather confused; for this reason it has generally eluded close examination. In the historiography of the Royal Navy in this period, the discourse has generally revolved around stereotyped images of revolutionaries and reactionaries. The argument is that the corps, dominated by old gentlemen, was intent on maintaining its privileges and traditions with no regard for social and professional change. This is a distortion. The example of Charles Fitzgerald was a case in point. While Admiral Fitzgerald willingly accepted technology and the consequent changes, he was still highly critical of Fisher's new training scheme. Also, Lord Charles Beresford has been portrayed as a reactionary despite his advocacy of staff command and his general approval of the Selborne Scheme and reform in general before his conflict with Fisher.

On a deeper level than mere personalities, there was a divided response to the drastic changes in naval and professional affairs. This split reaction was represented in the so-called materialist and historical-intellectual schools of thought. The conventional and logical response to these dramatic changes and the questioning of the professional competence of the executive officer was the integration of scientific education and the

advent of technical specialization. In essence, the executive naval officer would be expected in the future to be fully conversant with emerging technologies and would spend the bulk of his time carrying out technical duties. The *Britannia* education system and the foundation of the R.N. College at Greenwich, as well as the extension of specialist lines in the executive, were indicative of this trend. Specialist lines in various fields virtually turned executive officers into technical experts and the Torpedo and Gunnery specializations became valuable stepping-stones to promotion. A glance through the lists of officers passing through *Excellent* and *Vernon* provides a veritable who's who of the flag list.

The ultimate expression of that trend was the advent of the Selborne Scheme of education in 1902 that integrated the training of all combatant officers of the deck, engine room and marines. These officers would spend the bulk of their extended college education in engineering sciences and mathematics and would be required to obtain engine room watch-keeping certificates. The intention was that all future officers would in effect be engineers even though not all engineers would be executives. Even though this amounted to a virtual annexation of engineering by the line, executive officers were wary of the implications.

As naval education became increasingly technical and the officer corps tried to keep up with the times, there was a cacophony of protest that the essential spiritual aspect of command was being lost. Officers were being trained to deal with the technical minutiae of their duties but were losing the supposed "practicality" of former educational practices. The resulting system was a rather strange compromise that neither created efficient scientific education nor adequately trained the future leadership in the intangible

qualities of command, leadership, character and will. Concentration on this “practical” education was not a terribly effective way to train officers to command nor was there any professional reward for cultivating the wider or “sublime” aspects of naval leadership. Executive officers became so focussed on gaining high scores on examinations and achieving high performance on quantifiable tests, such as less-than-realistic battle practice, that they lost sight of the ends of naval power, which was their proper business. This was further complicated by a confusion of the practical and theoretical; especially since naval officers spent more time preparing for, rather than actually practising, their profession. As Douglas Haig wrote in a critique of the Slade Report, “...almost all aspects of the art of war are ‘theoretical’ in time of peace; they only become ‘practical’ when the actual killing begins.”<sup>5</sup>

The intellectual-historical school, most visibly exemplified by officers such as Reginald Custance and Cyprian Bridge, attempted to assert the superiority of practical command over technical means. Officers holding this view were by no means reactionary, nor did they reject technological change *per se*. Among officers associated with the “Young Turks,” who provided the younger generation of this school, the majority had specialized in one of the scientific branches. Herbert Richmond and Reginald Drax were torpedo officers, while Roger Bellairs and Kenneth Dewar were gunnery specialists. Recognizing the contributions of both schools, Drax wrote in 1913:

Can we not try each to appreciate the good qualities of the other, to admit that one is the complement of the other, and to all agree that at last we should credit our brother officers with working loyally for the

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<sup>5</sup> CCAC, Chartwell Papers (CHAR)13/26, Notes by Lt. General Douglas Haig on the Slade Report, February 1914.



good of the Service.... The theorist and the dreamer must admit, as indeed they do, that it was the practical man who built the Empire; it was the bull-at-gate Englishman, who often made mistakes, and paid for them with his life, who gave heed to theory, and yet won through by virtue of those qualities of courage, determination, and loyalty which are among the noblest attributes of mankind.<sup>6</sup>

While rejecting the mechanistic and the routine, this school sought to incorporate older traditions of command into a “scientific” framework through the agency of historical study. Rumblings in that direction prior to the war became a full-fledged thunderstorm by 1917 and contributed to the removal of Jellicoe from the Admiralty.

This revolution in command entailed the use of positivist history centred round the so-called “principles of war.” While recognizing the importance of changing technology, the proponents of history held that it was to be strictly subordinated to the ends of sea power. The use of the conceptual space in history for the personal element and for individual decision mirrored the concepts of scientific command as embodied in the naval staff. The staff, acting as advisors to commanders, not only collated and co-ordinated the flow of information but also, by instituting standardized procedures, alleviated what was called the “friction of war.” Hence, the essential nature of the older system of command would be preserved while giving it an edge by marrying it to scientific organization. The staff system would co-ordinate technological advances by integrating them into tactics and strategy and ensuring that they would mesh with the ends of naval power, the application of decisive force at sea. The staff system also served a visible role in reasserting the competence of the executive officer corps in the aftermath of Admiral Sir

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<sup>6</sup> Reginald Plunkett, “The Psychology of War,” *Naval Review*, I (1913), 106.

Arthur Wilson's rather frightening presentation of the Navy's war plans during a CID meeting in the middle of the Agadir crisis of 1911 when France and Germany were on the verge of war.<sup>7</sup> It also presented a mechanism to defuse controversy within the service by institutionalizing thought revolving around strategic and tactical doctrine. In light of the experience of the controversies of the first Fisher regime at the Admiralty (1904-1910) the contribution of the staff cannot be underestimated.

Furthermore, the near simultaneous development of staff officer training courses and *The Naval Review* provided the capacity to diffuse both the knowledge of and legitimacy for staff command throughout the service. They also provided an attempt at a self-correcting mechanism where tactical and strategic doctrine could be prevented from descending into dogma. Despite the promise of such a system, a nagging fear remained in the minds of several senior officers that the staff would further alienate general service officers from elite staff officers<sup>8</sup> and that it would conspire to limit the capacity and initiative of commanding officers.

The result of this process was the creation an officer corps that could speak the language of the modern era while continuing to justify its distinctly pre-modern form of leadership. It was able to do this despite nearly losing the First World War by the very fact of its willingness to change. When the older generation of officers seemingly failed to master this process, a younger one snapped at its heels. This new generation of officers was outraged (justifiably or not) at the failure of its seniors to meet expectations of

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Wilson's performance was so shocking to cabinet that the Asquith government mustered the resolve to impose a naval staff on the Navy whether it wanted it or not. This resulted in the virtual dismissal of Wilson and the removal of Reginald McKenna as First Lord.

<sup>8</sup> Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Admiralty Papers (ADM) 1/8496/185, Naval Staff Uniforms, 1917.

performance and had a concrete programme of reform at hand as the war exposed all the fault lines in the system of education and administration. Moreover, these younger officers were intelligent enough to cultivate contacts with powerful voices in the press, to gain at least the tacit support of some forward-thinking senior officers and to attract the attention of members of the War Cabinet, including the Prime Minister himself.

The conclusion of the war marked a decisive change in the culture of the officer corps. First of all, there was the stark realization that the Navy had not performed to the best of its ability in the conflict. Strategically, the submarine campaign had nearly led to defeat, and in tactical terms the Battle of Jutland was less than a resounding success. Furthermore, there was the realization that Britain would not likely enjoy such superiority in naval strength over a future opponent as it had over Germany. The limitations of the Washington Treaty of 1922 reduced the R.N. effectively to a one-power standard. Although in the immediate postwar years it was unlikely that Britain would become involved in a Great Power conflict, the services were still active in suppressing dissent within the Empire.

As we have seen, professionalization, particularly in the case of military organizations, is a dynamic process. As circumstances changed politically, culturally, socially and technologically, the matrix of skills required for an officer corps to retain its social and professional position also shifted. As the Navy became more like a large modern industrial complex, and its vessels more resembled a vast coalmine than a traditional ship-of-war, entirely different sets of skills and education were required to

manage it.<sup>9</sup> Whereas in the age of sail the naval officer had to co-ordinate various trades and skills to manage a ship effectively, at the turn of the century many of these trades had become professions, often with higher educational standards and better work control mechanisms than the executive officer corps itself. That being said, the social origins from where the Navy drew its executive officers did not change.

The First World War marked an essential transformation of the officer corps. First, although the system of half pay continued until 1938 and private income remained a definite asset, naval officers became full-time employees of the state and were no longer regarded as part-time contractees to be employed for particular commissions. This meant that active naval officers could not seek outside employment without the express consent of the Admiralty and that officers were expected to devote their full attention to mastering their jobs. Part-time employment as a M.P. while still on the active list was no longer acceptable. This was also reflected in the agitation by junior officers for better working conditions comparable to those gained by men in equivalent civilian occupations.

Second, the Navy in many respects became increasingly divorced from active politics. With the advent of the Labour Government in the 1920s, the old political connections to the dyarchy of the Liberals and Conservatives was broken. The Liberal Party was shattered and its remnants found themselves in bed with the Conservatives. With the wider political involvement of the population as a whole, decisions had to be made in a more open fashion. The Navy had to justify itself in the eyes of the electorate and was forced to accept closer scrutiny by Parliament. Despite fears over the possibility of a

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<sup>9</sup> C.C.P. Fitzgerald, "The War Training of the Navy: A Reply to Sir G Hornby," *United Service Magazine*, III (1891), 4.

Labour government after the war, when that spectre came to pass in 1924 the Navy found itself able to deal with the “socialists.”

Third, the Navy became increasingly accountable, not just to Parliament and the politicians but to a set of self-defined professional standards. Officers were increasingly judged on their respective merits and “toadies and lickspittles” – to borrow a phrase from C.S. Forester – were increasingly marginalized.<sup>10</sup> An example was the unpopularity of Frederic Dreyer after Invergordon. The Navy became increasingly aware that it could not afford to make sure that “Buggins” had his turn. As an institution it became more ruthless in weeding out surplus officers and in selecting able men to fill posts. This was made easier by a wider selection of officers with combat experience. Officers no longer meeting professional expectations increasingly found themselves unemployed or retired by the sheer force of circumstances, as fewer posts meant increased competition.

Fourth, moves were made to limit professional disagreements and to keep divergence of opinion on the active list within limits. There was, as the evidence seems to indicate, a profound recoiling from the fall-out of disputes between camps of naval officers before, during and after the Great War. For instance, Fisher and Beresford were rejected because they both washed the navy’s dirty laundry in public. A good example in the interwar period was a review of K.G.B. Dewar’s *The Navy from Within*, which appeared in the pages of the 1939 volume of *The Naval Review*:

Why does he so often seem to antagonize those who admire his intellect and value its products? Is it because in his fervent conviction of the rightness and urgency of his case, and in a forgetfulness that to slower-witted people the obvious is not so immediately obvious, he

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<sup>10</sup> C.S. Forester, *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower* (1950, London: Penguin, 1992), 15.

perhaps seems contemptuous of the intellect of those who he imagines to be reactionary opponents?<sup>11</sup>

Fifth, the Navy became an increasingly national institution, and not merely one managed by an elite. The coming of massive numbers of hostilities-only ratings and officers forced the Navy to develop connections outside the traditional service. The growth of administrative capacity and industrial relations forced naval officers to deal with issues larger than seamanship. Moreover, the close connections to other government departments and industry, such as the co-ordination of shipping and labour, led considerable numbers of individuals to be less than enthralled with certain aspects of naval life. As one R.N.V.R. officer wrote immediately after the armistice:

All the same you know, the Navy's rotten... It has good stuff in it but it wants, not reform, but revolution. The chief thing that is wrong is the fear of responsibility; everyone is afraid of his immediate superior and exerts himself chiefly in clearing his own yardarm, and I should think classes must be held in selfishness and lack of consideration for others.<sup>12</sup>

Sixth, there was the growth of non-traditional arms in the Navy and combat experience outside the big ships of the Grand Fleet. The submarine arm, the destroyer and convoy forces and the Royal Naval Air Service (R.N.A.S.) became large enough that they could not be ignored. Many top-flight commanders in the Second World War saw action in places other than the Grand Fleet: Andrew Cunningham was a destroyer officer, Bruce Fraser was at the Dardanelles, and Max Horton was a submariner. Although the Fleet Air

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<sup>11</sup> "Review of *The Navy From Within* - I," *Naval Review*, XXVII (1939), 318.

<sup>12</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), H.W. Richmond Papers (RIC) 2/1, letter by unidentified R.N.V.R. officer, 28 November 1918. Indeed, the officer went on to mention the case of one medical officer who was reluctant to distribute "venereal disease preventatives" because of the religious views of the ship's captain.

Arm (F.A.A.) was placed under the authority of the Air Ministry, significant contacts remained with the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.). There was a closer connection between the “fleet” navy and the “bug trap” navy.

Seventh, an awareness developed that continual improvement was not only positive but also mandatory. There was a realization even among hardliners that not everything went as well as it could have. Unless the Navy wanted to have further interference in its professional arrangements, it needed to set things right.

Eighth, to borrow an idea from Samuel Huntington, officers became increasingly aware of the importance of having a broad as well as a specialized knowledge of world affairs.<sup>13</sup> This concern was reflected in the pattern of sending junior naval officers whose education had been incomplete to university for a year to gain a wider view of their profession. “This course is designed to broaden the outlook on life and to bring officers into contact at an impressionable age with University thought and University ideas.”<sup>14</sup> If the executive branch existed to serve the public good, it followed logically that it must have an idea of what defined that good. Moreover, to secure its leadership within the naval establishment it had to deal with other professional men on an equal footing. By virtue of this technology, engineers claimed control over a significant portion of the naval establishment. Combined with the executive’s core function of command in war, it was rarely practised; when it was, as in the case of the Great War, the results were not always satisfactory.

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, “Statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty Explanatory of the Navy Estimates, 1920-21,” vol. XXVIII, Cmd. 619 (1920), 667.

The entire period from 1880 to the end of the Great War marked an essential transformation of the executive officer corps of the Royal Navy. While at the same time its members attempted to maintain a collective identity and the so-called “culture of command,” there was a profound recognition of the importance of specialization and the consequent of executive competence. While the corps, along with the rest of British society, was undergoing at times uncertain and bewildering change there was a simultaneous search for a cultural and intellectual grounding. A framework was sought that attempted to address profound social, economic, technological and organization change in a systematic and coherent manner yet still retain the importance of the individual and the spiritual aspects of the military art.



## Appendix I

### First Lords of the Admiralty 1880-1919

The Earl of Northbrook	1880-1885
Lord George Hamilton	1885-1886
The Marquess of Ripon	1886
Lord George Hamilton	1886-1892
The Earl Spencer	1892-1895
George Goschen	1895-1900
The Earl of Selborne	1900-1905
The Earl of Cawdor	1905
Lord Tweedmouth	1905-1908
Reginald McKenna	1908-1911
Winston S. Churchill	1911-1915
Arthur J. Balfour	1915-1916
Sir Edward Carson	1916-1917
Sir Eric Geddes	1917-1919
Walter Long	1919-1921

*Source: First Lord of the Admiralty*; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Lord\\_of\\_the\\_Admiralty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Lord_of_the_Admiralty); Internet; accessed 15 December 2004.

### First Sea (or Naval) Lords 1880-1919

Sir Astley Cooper Key	1879-1885
Lord Hood of Avalon	1885-1886
Sir John Hay	1886
Lord Hood of Avalon	1886-1889
Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton	1889-1891
Sir Anthony Hoskins	1891-1893
Sir Frederick Richards	1893-1899
Lord Walter Kerr	1899-1904
Sir John Fisher	1904-1910
Sir Arthur Wilson	1910-1911
Sir Francis Bridgeman	1911-1912
H.S.H. Prince Louis of Battenberg	1912-1914
Sir John Fisher	1914-1915
Sir Thomas Jackson	1915-1916
Sir John Jellicoe	1916-1917
Sir Rosslyn Wemyss	1917-1919
Sir David Beatty	1919-1927

*Source: Admiralty*; available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admiralty>; Internet; accessed 15 December 2004.

## Appendix II – Navy Strength and Expenditure

Date	Personnel	Wages (£)	Total Estimates (£)
1888-9	62,400	3,214,607	13,776,572
1892-3	74,100	3,679,589	15,266,811
1897-8	100,050	4,696,000	22,338,000
1902-3	122,500	5,962,000	31,255,500
1907-8	128,000	6,869,700	31,419,500
1911-2	134,000	7,511,500	46,204,799
1914-5	151,000	8,800,000	53,573,261

Source: Lower Deck, *The British Navy from Within* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), 11

### British Government Spending 1860-1913

£ millions

Year	Gross Spending	Army and Ordnance	Navy	Total Defence	Debt Charges
1860	69.6	14.1	10.8	24.9	28.7
1885	88.5	18.6	11.4	30	29
1895	100.9	17.9	17.5	35.4	23.3
1896	105.1	18.5	19.7	37.2	22.8
1913	184.0	28.1	44.4	72.5	19.9

Source: William Ashworth, "Economic Aspects of Late Victorian Naval Administration," *Economic History Review* 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, vol. XXII, No. 3 (1969), 491.

### Appendix III

#### Parentage of Engineer Students Entering Royal Naval Engineering College, Keyham, 1897-1905 (Old Scheme)

Father	1897	98	99	1900	01	02	03	04	05
Naval Officers (most engineer officers)*	8	6	8	5	4	9	4	3	7
Army Officers	1	1			1				2
Marine Officers		1							
Warrant Officers RN	2	2	2		1	1		1	3
Petty Officers RN	1								
Merchant Marine					1	1		1	3
Civil Servants		2	2	2	3	2	2	2	3
Dockyard Officers	1			5	2	1			1
Clergymen		1	2	1	1	1		1	
Barristers	1			1					
Solicitors			2		2	2			3
Journalists			2						
Doctors					1	1	1		1
Bank Cashiers			1	1	2	2		1	1
Architects					1				
School Masters	3	2	3	2	2	2			1
Civil Engineers		1	1	1	1	1	2		1
Managers		3	1		2	1	1		1
Shipowners					1				
Tea or Coffee Planters	1	1							
Merchants	1	3	3	1	1		1	2	3
Manufacturers	1	2	3	1	3	1			1
Tailors, Drapers		1	2	4	2	2	1		1
Secretaries		1		1				1	
	1897	98	99	1900	01	02	03	04	05

Accountants					1		2		
Commercial Travellers	1			1	1	2			
Farmers	3	1	3	2		1		2	
Farm Bailiff						1			
Land Agents	1					1	1	1	
Brewers	2					2	2		
Builders	1			2				1	1
Brokers				2	1				
Chemists		1			2				
Ironmonger					1				
Grocers			1		2				
Butchers	2							1	
Hairdressers		1							
Carpenter					1				
Misc	3	2	3	1	1	5	3	3	5
Jeweller			1						
No Occupation		2		3	2	6			3
Company Directors						3			1
Total	34	34	41	36	44	46	20	20	42

\*Significantly, only four engineer students were the sons of executive officers and they were the sons of three retired lieutenants and one retired commander.

Source: PRO,ADM 7/931 Statistics of Engineering Students.

### Appendix V Officers - Estimated War Needs 1920

Ships	CAPT	CDR	LT	LT(G)	LT(T)	LT(N)	S/LT	LT (RNR)	CDR(E)	LT(E)
50 Battleships	50	50	369	50	50	50	108	45	50	100
16 Battleships (res)	16	16	-	16	16	16	-	-	16	16
14 Battle Cruisers	14	14	70	14	14	14	16	14	14	42
25 Armoured Cruisers	25	25	119	25	25	25	76	-	25	50
8 Armoured Cruisers (res)	8	8	-	8	8	8	-	-	8	8
82 Light Cruisers	74	23	164	78	4	82	82	15	82	82
8 Light Cruisers (res)	8	8	8	8	8	8	-	-	8	8
18 Torpedo Gun Boats	11	40	117	14	12	54	10	-	29	29
2 Armed Merchant Cruisers	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
270 Destroyers + depots	-	70	431	-	-	208	65	-	-	208
11 Torpedo Boats	-	-	51	-	-	-	51	-	-	-
115 Submarines	-	-	234	-	-	-	153	-	-	-
RN Air Service	-	9	160	-	-	-	-	-	2	6
Retinues	3	13	41	2	8	-	10	-	3	2
Shore Service & tenders	59	79	96	16	11	22	1	-	87	46
5% margin	13	17	93	13	7	24	28	4	17	30
Total	283	362	1,956	244	163	521	600	78	341	627

Source: PRO, ADM 1/8370/65, Report on Supply of Officers, April 1912. Note (res) = reserve fleet.

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FCD Sturdee Papers  
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<sup>¶</sup> Note: Ranks given are the highest achieved.



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